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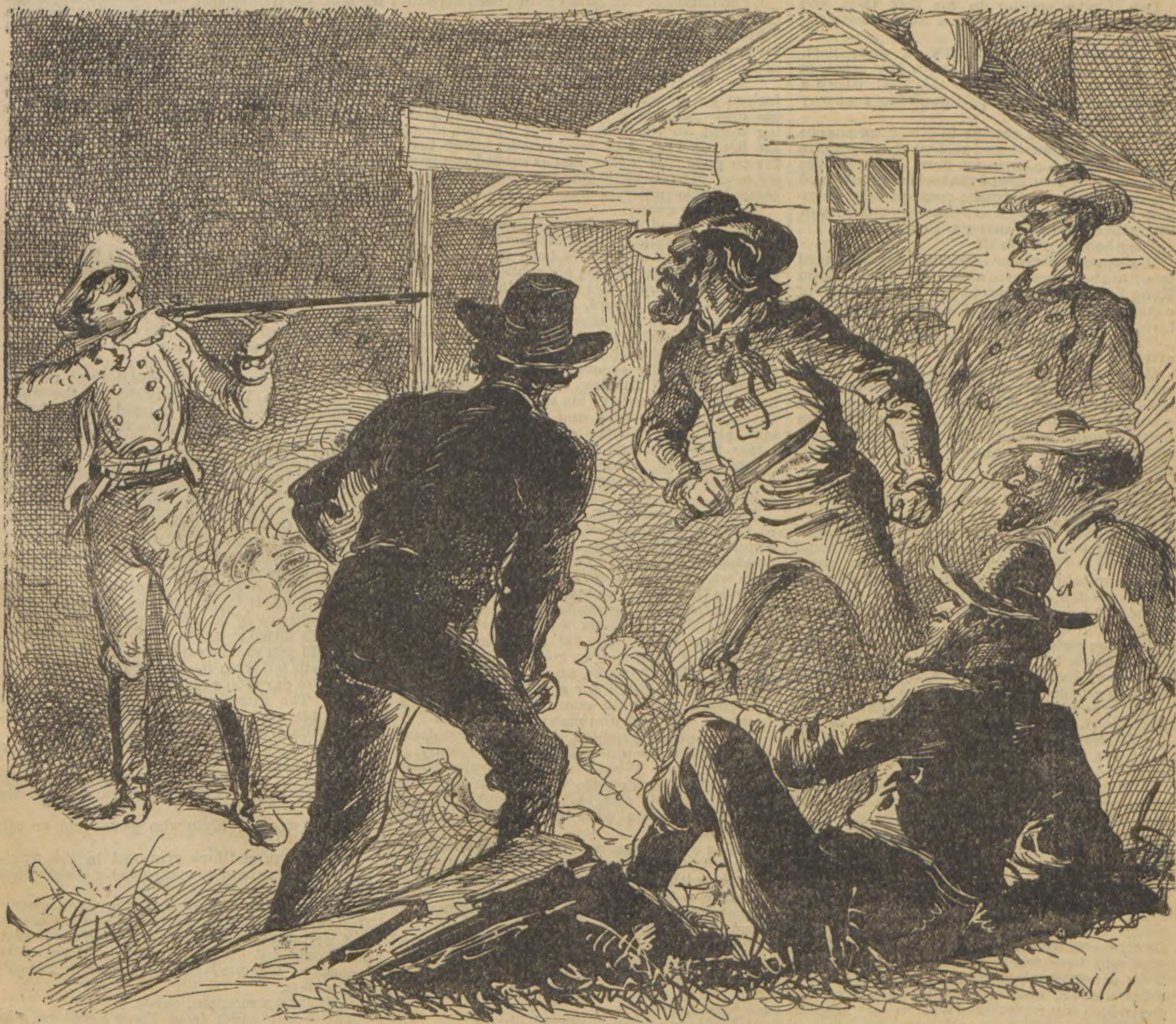
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KINKFOOT KARL, The Mountain Scourge; or, Wiping Out the Score.

BY MORRIS REDWING.



"I AM NOT HERE EITHER TO DIG GOLD OR TO STEAL IT, BUT—" "WHAT THEN?" DEMANDED RUNG LAPSTONE, AS THE YOUTH PAUSED, WITH SUDDEN HESITATION. "TO FIND THE GREATEST VILLAIN THAT GOD EVER PERMITTED TO LIVE, AND AVENGE THE MURDER OF MY MOTHER!"

Kinkfoot Karl, THE MOUNTAIN SCOURGE;

OR,

Wiping out the Score.

A Story of Wild Life in the Mines.

BY MORRIS REDWING.

CHAPTER I. THE ACCUSATION.

"HOLY Moses! Rung, look thar!"

The speaker, a rough-looking, bearded man, clad in the habiliments of a Western miner, started up from his knees, and pointed with one grimy finger at a little opening in the floor, while his face assumed a look of intense feeling—surprise, chagrin and anger being about equally dominant.

The speaker's companion, who stood some feet away, turned about at once and peered into the opening, which was vacant now, although marks on the damp soil indicated that not long since the place had not been untenanted.

"Eh? What does this mean?"

Bending over, the second miner glared fixedly at the cavity for an instant, then his features relaxed, and a smile, deepening quickly into a laugh, followed. This levity did not seem to please the man on his knees, who turned fiercely on his companion:

"Rung Lapstone, w'at's got inter ye? Some men 'ud laugh at er funeral, an' you're one of 'em, I do believe. Don't yer see the gold are gone?—a bull year's hard labor wiped out all to onc't, quick's er stroke o' lightnin'. Murderation!"

"A good joke, Dan—a mighty good joke!" uttered Rung Lapstone, the pleased look still lingering on his face. "I like practical jokes myself, and you're mighty good at it, Dan—mighty good!"

"You chattering idiot, what d'ye mean?"

Dan Bryne sprung to his feet then, and faced his companion with a dark, menacing scowl.

"Ef there's any jokin', it's on your part, Rung. I don't see whar thar's any sense in crackin' jokes on a thing o' this kind, where a hull fortin' is wrapped up; I don't feel that way—I kin tell ye."

From the sudden change in the countenance of Rung Lapstone, it was evident that he quite agreed with his companion now. He could see in the face of Dan Bryne that which proclaimed his earnestness and truth; consequently, there was but one theory to explain the emptiness of the little excavation under the cabin floor.

They had been robbed!

It was not a pleasant thought. A year's hard labor in the mines gone at one fell stroke. Even Rung Lapstone was moved now, and a look of chagrin and dismay took the place of the late levity.

"My God, Dan, we are robbed then!" finally articulated Lapstone.

Both men were now deeply excited. Bryne sprung to the door, flung it open, and peered out into the night. The hour was not late, and a ringing camp-song was borne to his ears from down the grade, where several miners' cabins stood, and where the glow of an outdoor fire lit up the night.

The pleasant sound of the singer's voice jarred harshly on the ears of the twain in the upper cabin.

"Confound Hyte, he always is a blating!" snarled Bryne. He turned abruptly, and faced his friend. "Somethin's got to be done, pard. Ef a mountain coyote hez been hyar, we'll hunt him to his den, an' string 'im higher'n' w'at's 'is name. Durn it, I don't feel good, but mighty ugly just now."

The speaker's face would not belie his words. The miner's brow was deeply corrugated, his teeth shut hard, and a fierce, tigerish glow in his deep-set black eyes.

He turned back and snatched a rifle from the wall and then turned once more to the door.

"Which way now, Dan?"

"Down yon fu'st. Mebbe the thief hain't left camp."

Taking his own rifle, Rung Lapstone followed his partner from the cabin. In the course of five minutes they descended to the collection of cabins designated as Sure Deal, a name hardly appropriate, yet the little village had prospered fairly well since its inauguration a year and more before.

Not one of the gentler sex abided in the place, and only a dozen cabins occupied the mountain level. It could hardly be termed a village, and its prospects were none of the best. No liquor was sold here, but plenty of it was brought in from a neighboring mining-village, some ten miles distant, and every cabin had its black jug, which was replenished with weekly regularity.

Six men sat without the row of cabins, about a blazing fire, when the two pards from up the grade appeared on the scene. Samson Hyte

had closed his song, and was just filling a short black pipe, when the twain arrived on the ground.

"Hello, pards!" exclaimed Hyte, who had a stentorian voice, he being young and powerful, and one of the happiest miners on the range. "Look's so you might be out looking fur game. Ho, ho!"

"We are," answered Rung Lapstone solemnly.

Then, in a few words, the man related the facts so far as known, regarding the loss of the hoarded store of gold.

"We had enough to make us moderately rich men," concluded Lapstone, "and now it is gone, evry red, and we are poor. I tell you, pards, it's enough to make a fellow feel bad clear down into his boots."

"When was it took?" questioned Hyte.

"To-day—since dinner," uttered Dan Bryne, with a dark frown. "Somebody's been snoopin' 'mong ther cabins. Mebbe ourn ain't the only one as has been robbed."

Bryne glanced about over the rough, bearded faces, and was evidently trying to pick from the number the thief. No satisfaction was derived from the scrutiny, however. There were others of the miners in the cabins, and as the news of the robbery spread, they came flocking out, until a score of faces surrounded the fire. The whole camp was out, and moved to its depths at the new.

The miners are a law unto themselves, and woe to the gold-thief did he fall into the hands of the diggers! To shoot a man in a quarrel was scarcely an offense in the eyes of these men, but to rob a fellow-miner of his hard-earned store, was a capital offense, punishable with speedy death. Certainly no man would lightly incur the anger of the stout miners.

Great excitement prevailed, and some oaths were mingled with the muttered words of the indignant gold-diggers. But cursing would not bring back the lost store, nor produce the thief for punishment. Of a sudden, however, a name was mentioned that sent a murmur through the crowd.

"Whar is Little Gaudy?"

"The dandy o' ther mines hain't been here to-night."

For some moments a solemn silence rested over the crowd, but it was soon broken by the voice of Dan Bryne.

"Ay! whar's Little Gaudy? Let him come for'ard an' give an account of himself," hissed the miner, clinching his rifle tightly, and glaring about on the dark faces of the men about the fire. "Ther little whelp never come here fur no good. He's ther cuss as robbed my pard an' me. Whar's Little Gaudy? Who's seen the blasted little runt?"

No answer came.

"Rung," and Dan Bryne turned suddenly upon his comrade, "we must hunt down ther dandy; he's the man who's been ter our cabin like er mountain coyote, an' robbed us. Whar is ther little skunk? Let us find him."

"Little Gaudy is here. What is wanted?"

All started at the clear, ringing voice, and the next moment a youth forced his way to the front, and stood plainly revealed in the glow of the mountain fire—a smooth-faced youth, with raven hair and flashing dark eyes. His hair hung in curls down to his shoulders; a jaunty hat sat upon his head, and his dress was brilliant, and gaudy in the extreme. It was this latter fact that had given him the name of "Little Gaudy," a name that had clung to him from the first day he set foot in the mining-country.

The youth could not have been over twenty, and he might have been some years less. His countenance was open and frank, and quite handsome, and, until to-night, nothing bad had been whispered against his name.

Little Gaudy was comparatively a new-comer in Sure Deal, having made his appearance for the first time about six weeks before the opening of our story. He did not come with the intention of digging for gold—that was not in his line. Why he came no one knew, since he seemed better fitted for a ladies' boudoir than the rough mountain country. He was here, however, and had won many friends.

But to-night, a sudden, dark suspicion dwelt in more than one mind against Little Gaudy.

"I am here. What is wanted?" again uttered the youth, dropping the breech of a light rifle to the ground, and looking about upon the assembled miners with the air of a puzzled questioner.

"You know durn well what yer wanted fur, coyote!" hissed Dan Bryne, facing the young camper with a black look, that was calculated to make a tenderling shudder. But the look, fierce and dark as it was, did not frighten the dandy of the mines in the least.

"I have been absent in the hills all day, and just returned," said Little Gaudy. "I judge, by the excitement exhibited, that something's gone wrong. Will you be kind enough to tell me what it is?"

"Leetle hypocrite!" sneered Bryne.

"That will do, Dan Bryne," uttered the youth, in a low, concentrated voice, a flash of resentment shooting from his eyes. "I am

willing to be called harsh names if I am deserving of them, but no man here shall insult me to my face and go scot-free. Remember that. Now tell me what this racket is all about."

"Wal, mebbe you don't know, Dandy, but I b'lieve you do. Somebody robbed my pard an' me of every blasted nugget, an' 'twixt me 'n' you 'n' ther gate-post, I reckon you know who did it," uttered Dan Bryne in a voice of concentrated passion.

CHAPTER II.

UNDER THE SCOURGE.

FOR some moments after Dan Bryne uttered the accusation, Little Gaudy stood looking fixedly into the miner's face, in a way that was destined soon to annoy the man deeply.

"I say you know who robbed my pard and me," hissed Bryne, leering savagely in the face of the dandy.

"Well?"

There was a contemptuous coolness in the word that went like a dart to the heart of the huge miner. Bryne grated his teeth, until the sound reached the ears of all, and his huge hands worked nervously, one falling to the haft of a bowie that depended from his belt.

"You durn little runt!" hissed Dan Bryne at length, returning the young dandy's look with a fierce scowl.

"I say you are the coyote that took our gold. You daren't deny it."

"I do deny it," returned Little Gaudy, drawing himself up proudly. "The man who openly says I ever robbed a living soul lies, and—Put back your knife, for I will be heard!"

Dan Bryne had drawn his bowie, but the muzzle of Little Gaudy's rifle peered into his face, reminding him that it was not exactly safe to assault the boy just then.

"No, you shall all hear me. I am not here either to dig gold or to steal it, but—"

"What then?" demanded Rung Lapstone, as the youth paused, with sudden hesitation.

"To find the greatest villain that God ever permitted to live, and avenge the murder of my mother!"

Fierce and low the words were flung in the teeth of the questioner, who recoiled as though stricken a sharp blow in the face. A moment only thus, and then a cold sneer touched the face of Rung Lapstone.

"You can't wool us in that way, young man. I boldly avow that it is my belief that this young rooster is the robber. Pards, see that he does not escape; Dan and I will search his cabin."

This announcement was received with a cry of approval from a score of throats, and menacing glances were cast upon the little man on whom grave suspicion had alighted.

"To his cabin," was the reply.

A smile broke over the handsome face of Little Gaudy. Why should he fear? Conscious of his innocence, he could afford to laugh at the accusations of Rung Lapstone and his partner, Dan Bryne.

"I will keep you company," said Little Gaudy, and as no one said him nay, he went with the crowd to the humble cabin eighty rods up the incline, and less than ten from the one occupied by Lapstone and Bryne. The latter carried his rifle at a trail, and did not remove his eyes from Little Gaudy during the walk. He had resolved not to depend on his bowie when next he was called upon to encounter the young mountaineer.

Rung Lapstone bore a torch in his hand, and when the little cabin was reached, he pushed open the door without ceremony, and flashed the light about inside. There was but one room, and this illy furnished. A fire smoldered in one corner, near which was a stool. On the walls hung skins and the horns of a magnificent buck, trophies of the chase.

The search began, and soon every nook and corner of the little shanty was explored, without any discovery of gold being made.

A smile flitted across the face of Little Gaudy.

"I told you so," he said.

An oath fell from the lips of Dan Bryne.

"We're durn fools ter expect ter find ther gold hyar. The little runt are sharp enough ter corral his steal whar ord'nary eyes won't look. I say, let's make him confess."

"You can't do that," and Little Gaudy looked his defiance.

"Boys, I moves we go back and let the youngster alone. I don't believe he's got the gold."

It was Samson Hyte who gave vent to this opinion.

His smooth red face glistened in the torch-light, as he turned a sympathetic glance upon the suspected youth.

Hyte was young, jolly and of an even temper. His was not a suspicious nature, and besides, he had seen more of Little Gaudy than the others, and would not believe him guilty of a crime so heinous as the one laid at his door by the robbed miners.

"Hold on a moment, pards."

The words came from Rung Lapstone, who had suddenly made a discovery—a soft spot under a low shelf in the corner of the room nearest the door. A bit of plank had been

rounded at the corner, leaving a spot not covered. Bending down, Lapstone began eagerly digging up the soft dirt with his fingers. Soon he drew forth a small canvas bag, and held it up to the light. There were hard bits inside, that felt like nuggets.

A low murmur of excitement went through the room. The most astonished looking person present was Little Gaudy. Carefully Rung Lapstone opened the sack and discovered within nuggets of gold.

"I thought so," he muttered. "You all heard the dandy say he came not here to dig gold, pards?"

A cry of assent followed.

"Here's gold, a small amount in this sack. I recognize the bag as one of several Dan and I had in our cabin; Little Gaudy is the thief!"

Of course this announcement was received with no little sensation, and Rung Lapstone held up the bag, and glared with triumphant leer into the pale face of Little Gaudy, saying without speaking the words—"What have you to say now, thief?"

Had Little Gaudy wished to escape, it could not have been done, since several miners stood between him and the door, and one of these was the huge Dan Bryne, whose recent loss made him a bad man indeed.

"Look furdur, pard," growled Bryne, in a husky undertone.

Once more Lapstone bent to the work, scooping up handfuls of moist earth, but all his search revealed nothing further. It was singular that the robber had concealed so little of his stealings in this spot, since he had made it a receptacle for any.

"No more gold here, pards," announced Lapstone, after a thorough search; "but we know the thief, and we'll make him confess. We can't afford to lose ten thousand dollars in this way."

"No, no; make ther runt tell whar he's hid ther gold," cried a voice in the crowd.

"What have you to say, Little Gaudy?" questioned Lapstone, turning once more upon the dandy. "Will you tell us what you have done with the bulk of our gold? You know the fate of one who steals and lies about it. Make a clean breast of it, now that you have been caught, and I'll swear you sha'n't be hurt."

The face of Little Gaudy was deadly pale now, and the muscles about his small mouth twitched with deep feeling.

"My soul! how can this be?" he groaned.

"That gold—I did not know of its being in this cabin until this moment—I swear it."

"Bosh!" sneered Rung Lapstone. "You can't crawl out in this way. Tell the truth and shame the devil now. If you don't, you'll swing from the limb of a tree before you are an hour older."

"It is false, false! I never took your gold," cried the youth, hotly, excitedly.

"Then how came *this* here?" sneered the incredulous Rung Lapstone, waving the bag before the young dandy's eyes.

"I know nothing about it. There's a conspiracy, somewhere, to ruin me," groaned Little Gaudy.

"Make ther little runt confess," repeated Dan Bryne, and this seemed the sentiment of the majority present. They were all interested in the punishment of gold-thieves, were anxious to make an example of the present one.

Few liked Little Gaudy on account of his gentleness, and as he was not a gold-digger, it was easy to see how he could be the thief.

Strong hands seized the dandy, and bore him from the cabin. A gnarled tree stood but three rods from the cabin, and to this the boy was bound, with his face to the trunk. The youth was in the hands of a pack of merciless hyenas, of whom Rung Lapstone was the chief. He ruled and led the miners of Sure Deal, and with them his word was law.

Sixteen stout men gathered about the tree to which the boy was bound, sixteen rough and bearded men, who had left gentleness and refinement behind them, when they crossed the plains to dig gold from the bowels of the California mountains.

Fagots were heaped together near the victim of border justice, and a fire soon lit up the scene.

At this time Rung Lapstone stepped to the front with a big "blacksnake" in hand, which he flourished dramatically, as he took his position near the little dandy, whose clothing had been stripped down to his waist, revealing the bare white skin to the rude gaze of the assembled miners.

"Confess, youngster," and with the word, Lapstone raised his whip.

"I have told you the truth," uttered Little Gaudy. "I did not take your gold. You may kill me, but I can tell you nothing different."

"We'll see about that, my young buck."

Aloft went the whip, but a hand caught the miner's arm, preventing its descent. Lapstone turned with an oath, to look into the face of Samson Hyte.

"Don't strike him, Rung; ther boy is innocent."

Rung Lapstone jerked his arm loose savagely.

"By St. Jagol Samson, you interfere here

at your peril," cried the brutal miner, with an angry, menacing frown. "This boy's got ter confess or take the worst hidin' any man ever got and lived. Just keep your distance, pard, or you may come in for a share."

For a minute the two men glared into each other's eyes, and the fire that flashed from the steel-gray orbs of Rung Lapstone was met by a defiant response from the blue ones of the young giant of the mines.

"As you will," muttered Samson. He turned away then, and was not seen for a long time after. He had a heart, and felt that a brutal wrong was about to be committed, a wrong that he was powerless to avert.

Without more words, Rung Lapstone raised his whip and brought it down with vengeful force across the bare back of the bound victim of his hate. Once, twice, thrice came the swift whirl of the cruel lash, and the last stroke brought the red blood, that streamed over the glowing back of poor Little Gaudy, and dyed the scourge with a crimson stain.

CHAPTER III.

DEADLY SHOTS.

Not a groan escaped the lips of Little Gaudy thus far, and this stoicism enraged Rung Lapstone beyond measure.

"I'll make the little thief squirm and cry for mercy, or kill him!"

Low and fierce came the words from the thick lips of the brutal miner, and he wielded the whip rapidly, the cruel lash fairly whistling through the air at each stroke. The back of Little Gaudy was now a raw and bleeding mass.

"Confess, you little devil!" hissed the mad executioner, as he bent his shaggy head close to the face of the bound youth. But he saw a sight then that caused him to utter an oath of disappointment and surprise.

Little Gaudy was insensible. He had fainted under the cruel treatment he had received, and was no longer sensible of the blows.

"Durn it, pard, w'at's ther rip? G'n the little runt a few more cuts," growled Dan Bryne.

"No use; the little scamp has fainted," answered Rung Lapstone, drawing the gory lash across his sleeve to remove the blood.

"Fainted! Hain't got the grit of a louse."

"Durn little snipe; didn't do no good ter hide him, arter all."

"Maybe it has," suggested Lapstone. "When he comes to himself, he may feel glad enough to confess. If he don't, I'll cut his little carcass into inch pieces. No man can rob me with impunity."

"Don't know w'at that ar' 'punish' is, but I b'lieve you are right," was the heartless response of Dan Bryne.

The miners decided it was best to leave the scourged victim of mining-justice by himself for a time, promising to come and finish the work when the boy should recover his senses, if he ever did, which at least one of the residents of Sure Deal very much doubted.

Rung Lapstone retired to his own cabin, while Bryne accompanied the miners back to the settlement, talking loudly of his wrongs.

Twenty minutes later, a man came forth from the cabin that had been robbed, and glanced sharply about. The fire that illumined the spot where Little Gaudy had been scourged, was well-nigh burnt down, and the tree and victim were in deep shadow.

"I will make sure work of the little scamp now; then all will be well."

When Little Gaudy opened his eyes, after a night of unconsciousness, a semi-gloom hung about the spot. Before he was permitted to recall the situation, a tread fell on his ear, and a dark face peered into his, the face of Rung Lapstone!

"Hol you are awake I see," ejaculated the miner. "Do you know me, Little Gaudy?"

"I do. If you kill me, devil, I will haunt you to the last day of your life; remember that, you villain."

"I'm not afraid of spirits," sneered Lapstone. "Was it true, pard, what you said a while ago?"

"What?"

"That you was looking for some one who killed your mother?"

"It was true."

"Look at me," cried Rung Lapstone sharply, a gleam of satanic delight in his eyes. "I killed a woman once, a woman who might have saved her life for the asking as you might yours by confessing. Perhaps I'm the man you seek."

"Good Heaven!" ejaculated the boy. "Then your name is Harris Maltby!"

"It is, my puny pard," interrupted the miner. "You know too much. A sickly chap like you can't expect long life. Go to your mother!"

A sharp cry, a smothered groan, and then all was still.

The fingers of Rung Lapstone closed about the delicate throat of Little Gaudy, shutting off speech and breath. With grated teeth the villain clung to his victim, until he ceased to show signs of life; then he released his hold and walked from the spot.

Scarcely had he gone, when a man stole from

the shadow of Little Gaudy's cabin, and stood beside the dead young dandy. He touched the bound and bleeding boy's face with his hand, then uttered a low cry:

"Dead! Murdered by Lapstone and his cowardly assassins! Hear me, Heaven! Every man who helped in this shall die—every man! and Rung Lapstone shall be the last—he shall die hard!"

A step startled the man, and he glided away, just as a dark form approached and stood where the husky-voiced avenger had been but a moment before.

"Poor lad, they've killed him, it seems. Wal, he war a good young feller, and I would a-saved him if I could," muttered the last arrival, who was none other than the jolly young miner giant, Samson Hyte.

While he stood here steps and voices were heard, and innumerable torches flamed on the air. The miners were returning to their work.

It was well that Little Gaudy was dead. His sufferings were over, and the brutal men who had witnessed the flogging were disappointed in their expectations. Samson Hyte stood there beside the bound corpse as the bearded men came up. His rifle lay across the hollow of his arm, and his ruddy, wholesome face held a deeper flame as he gazed in the faces of his late companions.

"Hello! Samson Hyte, w'at yer doin' hyer?" ejaculated Dan Bryne, as he met the glow of the young miner's eyes.

Samson Hyte stepped back a pace, and pointed to the bleeding back of the dead, and said, in solemn, thrilling tones:

"Look thar. It's murder, boys, and every one on ye had a hand in the work. Heavens! I wouldn't hev his blood on my hands for a fortin'."

"He war a thief."

"You don't know it," answered the stout young miner, hotly. "He was only a boy, pards, only a boy, and as gentle and happy as a child. You've killed him fur what? Jest because you s'picioned somethin' ag'in' him. Feller-diggers, you'll one and all be sorry fur this some day, or my name's not Samson Hyte."

"You're mighty peart all to onc't," snarled Dan Bryne. "Mebbe, now, you know some'at 'bout the lost gold? War you a pardner in the stealin'?"

"No, Dan Bryne, no, and you know'd you were wrong when you said them words," answered Hyte. "You did not make Little Gaudy confess, and now he's dead. Be you any better off?"

"This is no time for talk," put in Rung Lapstone at this moment, facing Samson Hyte, with a fierce scowl. "We're all satisfied that Little Gaudy was the thief, and the less words you waste over him the better, Samson. My advice to you is to keep a still tongue in your head."

"My tongue is my own," retorted Hyte, "and I will speak what I feel, let what will come. This killin' of Little Gaudy was murder. I don't take back that say fur no man livin'."

The young man faced Lapstone boldly, and returned scowl for scowl, and glare for glare.

Matters were assuming a serious aspect again. All knew the strength and coolness of the young athlete, Hyte. Equally well was the elder man, Lapstone, known, and the two, so far as courage and quickness of sight were concerned, were well matched. It was not the desire of Rung Lapstone to start a racket just then. He had enough on his hands and mind for the present. Of a sudden he burst into a laugh and said:

"Folks make fools of themselves sometimes, for a fact. Shake, pard, and call it square."

Lapstone extended his hand, but the young miner refused to accept it.

"Not with you, Rung Lapstone. You've murdered an innocent boy. I'll hev nothin' more to do with ye," and with the words Samson Hyte strode away into the gloom.

For some moments the miner boss gazed after the retreating man with bent, black brows, and the glitter of a deep anger in his steel-gray orbs. It seemed as though he was struggling desperately with an impulse that bade him follow Hyte, and have it out with him to the death. The flood of anger subsided, however, and Lapstone turned and regarded the corpse that was still bound to the tree.

"Curse ther little runt, he didn't confess arter all," growled Bryne. He spurned the body with his foot, and heaped bitter invective on the murdered boy. Again his foot was upraised to strike the bleeding corpse, when, of a sudden, the stout miner threw up his hands and fell like a log to the ground.

At the self-same instant the keen report of a rifle echoed through the hills.

Men who bent over Dan Bryne soon discovered that he was in need of no earthly help. A bullet had pierced his brain, and one of Little Gaudy's slayers had gone to his long, last account.

"Quick!" cried Rung Lapstone. "Don't let the assassin escape. It was that scoundrel, Samson Hyte."

There was a scattering then, and a search, but the night was black, and the mountain trails

dim. No good could come hunting in the gloom and so the search for the Unseen Slayer was given over.

The death of Dan Bryne cast a gloom over the rude miners. They had two graves to scoop from the mountain-side instead of one, and in solemn silence the bodies of the twain, Little Gaudy and Dan Bryne, were laid in the ground.

"Pards," said Rung Lapstone, in a voice breaky with emotion, "you all know that Dan Bryne was a mighty good fellow—he was my pard, and I loved him. Will you swear with me to avenge his death?"

"You bet, boss."

"Then draw as I do."

The speaker drew a bowie and held it across the grave of Dan Bryne. Almost instantly fourteen other blades gleamed above the fresh earth.

"We do solemnly swear."

After the chief, the words were scarcely repeated, when a sharp crack came echoing from the rocks above—the bark of a deadly rifle, and with a cry of rage and pain, Rung Lapstone reeled backward, holding up his hand. The bowie was gone, so was the index finger, shot clean from the hand by a leaden pellet from the rifle of an unseen foe.

"Murderation!" roared Lapstone, grasping his bleeding hand with the other, and dancing about, yelling with pain. The wildest commotion ensued. It certainly was not safe to remain in their present position, in the glare of the torches, and these were quickly flung away, and search made for the hidden foe.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WORK OF THE UNSEEN.

THE search revealed no clew to the mysterious slayer, whom the most of them believed to be Samson Hyte, the only man who had protested against the horrible outrage that had been committed.

That martyred boy was to prove a most bitter Nemesis for Rung Lapstone and his pals in the near future, as the continuation of our narrative will reveal. Almost his last words had been:

"Kill me if you will, Rung Lapstone; I die innocent, and will haunt you through all your mortal life for the deed."

The stout, bearded miner had laughed him to scorn, and deliberately murdered the youth, whose only crime was that of being suspected of theft.

Sure Deal was not a humane town, if town it might be called. Some of the miners were absent, however, during the scene of blood we have recorded, and among those absent were men who would have sympathized with, if they had been powerless to help Little Gaudy in the hour of his extremity.

When the absent miners returned, the story of the double tragedy was told them, and a general hunt was inaugurated for the murderer of Dan Bryne. The search was kept up for several days without success. Samson Hyte, if he was in the neighborhood, kept well from sight, knowing as he did, the angry passions that were roused against him, intensified by the bitter invective heaped upon him by Rung Lapstone, whose influence in Sure Deal was all-powerful.

When the search was at length given up, Rung Lapstone sent two men to the neighboring mining-village, and when they returned they were laden with ominous-looking black objects, dangling at their animals' sides—jugs, which were filled to the nose with pure Rocky Mountain "rot-gut," which was warranted to kill at forty rods or no sale.

"Boys," cried Rung Lapstone, clearing his throat, as he faced the miners at evening, with the ominous black jugs mounted on a box at his elbow, "the time has come for a little respite from our labors. You have all toiled hard of late, and especially have you been active in searching for the miserable coyote who killed Dan Bryne, as brave a man as ever handled a six-shooter, or conquered a bucking mule. He's gone, and so's the man who killed him. I lost my gold, but the thief fills six feet of mountain soil, and to make a long story short, it's my treat, and every man's welcome to all the lick he can drink. Boys, let's make a night of it. Sure Deal ain't so sure as 'twas, and maybe we'll bid it good-by before long. Here's to the memory of Dan Bryne, as true a pard as ever sucked lick through a rye straw."

The speaker opened the revel by pulling the cork of the largest jug, and lifting the nose to his lips, allowing the fiery liquor to gurgle down his throat.

A loud yell of approval followed the words and action of Rung Lapstone, and the miners gathered about, and were soon handling and passing the jugs freely.

As the whisky flowed, the voices of the miners and roughs became mingled in laughter, jest and song, soon to be changed to oaths and curses.

The usual fire blazed on the "common" in front of the line of cabins, and pandemonium seemed let loose for a time. In their excitement, caused by free indulgence in liquid light-

ning, the rough men became oblivious of all things save their own brutal enjoyment.

The light blazed, and the fagots crackled, while weird forms passed to and fro before the cabins. It was a wild scene, one calculated to disgust the nature of one used only to the civilized and enlightened side of human existence. Some of the brutes were wallowing in the dirt before an hour had passed, utterly besotted.

The moving spirit of the whole scene retired to one of the shanties, where, with a boon companion, he was enjoying a bottle of extra strong brandy, when, through the open cabin window leaped a dark form, and confronted Rung Lapstone and his companion.

In spite of his fuddled condition, Lapstone recognized the new-comer, and with the instinct born of a long life on the border, the miner's hand glided quickly to the butt of a weapon that hung at his hip.

"Draw and you die!" hissed the new-comer, covering each man with a cocked revolver, and Lapstone, drunk as he was, realized that the man uttered no idle threat, and consequently he allowed his hand to fall away from the weapon, while he glared, with a mad flame in his eyes, at his enemy.

Outside, the sounds of men in drunken debauchery was heard, to which, however, the inmates of the cabin paid no heed.

"Well, it seems you have the boldness to face the lion in his den," growled Rung Lapstone sullenly. "Now, tell us what you want, Samson Hyte?"

"You have been huntin' me fur the past week like you'd hunt a runaway nigger; you won't deny this?"

"No, I won't," sullenly.

"Dan Bryne is dead—"

"And I've lost the best finger on my right hand," interrupted Rung Lapstone, holding up his bandaged palm. "You shot pretty close, Samson Hyte; but I'll get even with you for it yet," and at the last a black scowl mantled the brows of the miner boss.

"No threats, old man," answered the young athlete, who never once lowered the muzzles of his deadly revolvers. "I will say fur your benefit, however, thet I didn't kill Dan Bryne."

"Nor clip this."

"Nor rob you o' yer finger," answered the young miner quickly.

"Maybe you expect us to believe that," sneered Lapstone.

"I am not peticular what you believe," answered Hyte. "I know you hev poisoned all the minds o' the boys ag'in' me; that's enough fur me to know. They'd like my heart's blood, jest on account of your lies, Rung Lapstone. No, don't b'ile over; 'twon't do you the least bit o' good. I'm here to tell ye jest what I think of ye. After to-night you won't see no more of Samson Hyte in Californy."

"Maybe you'll hang from a tree—"

"Or be tied up an' licked ter death, you would say," sneered the stout young miner. "You hain't got the power to do thet. Rung Lapstone. 'Coz you murdered Little Gaudy, you 'magine you kin scare men. It's a delusion. But, durn it, I didn't come byar to talk this nonsense. I worked a bit hard myself, in this mountain, an' 'wat little dust I hed digged I needed. I'm back for that."

"You didn't find it?"

"I did. You didn't know whar 'twas. I've got the little pile safe, and to-night sees the last o' Samson Hyte in Sure Deal. 'Twas the dust thet brought me back. As I've got that, I shan't return. I see'd the boys were havin' a big spree, so I thought it a safe time to come and bid you good-by, pard."

An oath was the only answer vouchsafed.

"Mad, ain't ye?" chuckled Hyte. "I expected it. 'My dust you can't have, Rung Lapstone. One thing more, and then I'm gone—jest a question. Who stole Dan Bryne's gold?"

"The little skunk who lays under mountain soil up yon," answered Lapstone, nodding toward the north.

"You know better'n that," said Hyte, sternly.

"What?"

"It was you who did the stealin', and you murdered Little Gaudy ter cover yer tracks!"

Then, before the miner boss could recover from his stupefaction, his visitor had leaped through the window and disappeared.

For some moments a dead silence held Lapstone and his companion in its grip, at the end of which time the boss miner leaped up, and rushed to the window, and peered out. The firelight glowed dimly on the long row of cabins, that was all. Samson Hyte had made good his escape.

For a wonder Rung Lapstone did not alarm the men outside. He knew it would result in no good. Samson Hyte, with a clear head and doubly armed, would prove an enemy not easily overcome, even had he remained and bid the miners defiance, which was not the case.

"Pard, let's licker," and Lapstone's companion raised the brandy bottle to his lips. "Ugh! the young cub was huffy ter-night, Rung."

The miner boss's companion had found his scattered wits at last, and breathed easier, now that the threatening revolvers had disappeared.

The gurgle of liquor down his throat was the only sound for some moments, and then:

"Hi Parker, there's business ahead!"

"Bet yer nuggets, boss," was the intelligible answer of the huge rough who crouched beside his superior.

"Business ahead," continued Rung Lapstone. "I expect the end of the month won't find me here."

Night fell, deeper and darker, as the hours sped on apace.

In a heap on the floor of the cabin occupied by Rung was his partner, dead in drunkland. Rung winked hard for a time, and then succumbed to Morpheus. He slept heavily. A silence stole over Sure Deal. Without the cabin lay many a form, deep in drunken sleep, from which no ordinary sound could wake them.

It was hours after Sure Deal slept that a hand grasped the shoulder of Rung Lapstone—shook him furiously, so that he awoke. A dim light filled the cabin from a sputtering tallow-dip on the greasy table near.

"Rung Lapstone, look and beware!"

The voice seemed to come from the ceiling, but a white hand was seen pointing to the wall, where, plainly visible even to the miner's bleared senses, was a huge bowie sticking in a log. How did it come there? Crawling on his knees to the wall, Rung Lapstone drew forth the blade, and then sunk back with a cry of horror.

Blood, warm and horrible to the touch, dripped from the bowie-blade, and fell upon the hand of the miner.

"Look! 'tis the vengeance of the dead!"

The voice echoed in the room; then a mocking, hollow laugh died on the air without. With a howl, Rung Lapstone started to his feet and bent over his companion. One glance at the pool of blood, the gashed throat, and the truth became evident: Hi Parker was dead—killed by the Unseen Slayer!

It was his blood that dripped from the bowie-blade!

An awful horror seized the sin-cursed soul of Rung Lapstone, and with a gasping cry of terror he sunk senseless to the floor, his own clothing dabbled with the blood of the slain miner.

CHAPTER V.

YANKEE PETE.

QUARTZVILLE was an old mining-village, that had long fell into decay. The coyote and the bat held sway here, the mines being deserted, since it was proved, to the satisfaction of all, that they had been worked to death. When this conclusion was arrived at, the settlers of Quartzville began to leave, and the time came when the once thriving village of the hills was a "deserted village" indeed.

But lo! a prospector, in looking in one of the deserted mines, more from curiosity than expectation of finding gold, struck a vein, which, upon examination, promised rich returns. The news soon spread; other miners came; new claims were staked, and the old village became animated with the stir of active life once more.

The prospector mentioned had come from Cape Horn, a mining-town twenty miles south, where the supply of silver and gold was not as it had been, and the sudden discovery near Quartzville sent many of Cape Horn's citizens there to investigate, resulting in a change of location. The consequence was, the old town became the new, and vice versa.

One of the most prominent citizens of Quartzville, the one who had come with money, and was now deep in mining speculation, was Rung Lapstone, our old acquaintance of Sure Deal. He had many of his old friends about him, partisans who swore by their master, and drank his whisky meantime.

Quartzville and Cape Horn were rivals in the race for ascendancy, and at the present rate of progress, the old-new town bade fair to soon outstrip its rival.

Rung Lapstone kept a gambling-hell, and was considered really the father of the revived old town. He had friends in plenty, was a "king among hogs"—to use the expression once heard to fall from the lips of a really refined New England lady—and carried everything with a high hand.

For more than six months Rung Lapstone had been enthroned in his new position when we look in upon him. Nearly eighteen months have passed since Sure Deal and its troublesome memories were left behind, and in a newer land than California, the miner boss has found security and immunity for all his crimes.

Being "well fixed," as the world goes, he could afford to take his ease, make money, and enjoy life to the top of his bent.

It was a hot day. The miners were all busy, and but few loafers were on the streets of Quartzville.

Rung Lapstone sat under the shade of his veranda, smoking a rank-smelling Havana(?), his feet hoisted to the top of a box, while his chair was tilted back against the rough boards of the house—his "Ranch," he called it—and in this position he presented a striking appearance, with his wide-rimmed hat laid off, his

black hair, long and wavy, and a flowing beard falling wide and low upon his breast.

He had been watching, for some moments, a solitary horseman, coming slowly down toward the center of the village, a queer-looking specimen of the *genus homo*, that, as he came fully into view, provoked a smile from the king of Quartzville.

"Well, what in the wide world of nature have we here?" uttered Rung Lapstone, removing his cigar and staring blankly, yet curiously, at the approaching figure.

And well might he thus exclaim, for a more odd-looking personage had never come under his observation.

A little figure "squat" upon a mustang. A white plug hat, long yellow hair, and a bit of yellow beard at the point of a long chin; hollow cheeks, and keen, twinkling eyes—the whole clad in a suit of homespun gray, and you have the figure approaching at a leisurely pace the center of Quartzville.

"Hello! stranger—which way?" queried Lapstone, with an amused smile touching the corners of his mouth.

The man on the mustang drew rein in front of the speaker, eyed him keenly for a moment, then said:

"Waal, now, mister, mebbe I've got to the end of my journey. I'm travelin' to a place put down on the map as Quartzville. Kin yeou tell me 'bout how far 'tis to sich a burg?"

"Just about no distance," my Yankee friend," answered the miner. "This is Quartzville."

"Dew tell."

The Yankee then slipped from his mustang, and lifted a pair of ancient saddle-bags, and with them hanging over his arm, walked to the steps, and peered up comically into the face of the miner boss.

"Bein's yeou know so much, p'raps yeou could tell me whar I'd find the chap called Rung Lapstone."

"Certainly: I'm the man."

"Yeou? Dew tell!"

Then out went one of the stranger's hands, which was grasped by Lapstone, and nearly crushed, calling forth from the lips of the man with the saddle-bags a groan of pain.

"Whew! whew!" exclaimed the Yankee, nursing his hand tenderly, and blowing on his fingers to ease the smart.

"What's the trouble, Yankee?" queried Lapstone, his face opening in a grin of delight at the antics of the man before him.

"Wow! Mighty powerful grip ye've got, stranger. I'd take ye for a second Samson, so I would. Ouch! So ye're Rung Lapstone, the rich lord o' ther mines. My! but ye've got a grip. Yeou must 'a' ben a prize-fighter onc't. Ye're sure yer Mr. Lapstone?"

"I am sure. What do you want with me? I've got some of the best whisky west of Pike's Peak. Come in; it's my treat to-day."

"No; I'm a heap obleeged, but I don't drink," answered the Yankee, as the miner rose from his chair. "Yeou see, I'm lookin' fur a place ter locate. It's told Mister Lapstone was a gentleman o' means, and 'u'd help me to git a foothold—"

"What have you got to sell?"

"Nawthin'; but I'm a medicine-man, as ther aborigines would say—a man of medicine, I say. I hain't no quack, nother, but a ginocine graduate o' old Bowdoin, where I learned to dissect a human creeper with dispatch. Got anybody as needs dissectin', Mister Lapstone? I can't be beat. Yeou keep a tavern, I heerd, and I thought it would be the proper place ter put out my shingle—see?"

"Quite proper," answered Lapstone. "As we have but one doctor in town, I've no doubt but what ye'll make your fortune in no time."

"Golly, how glad I am I struck such a pretty town. Lots o' money here I reckon?"

"Plenty as dirt."

"So I heerd 'fore I come to ther diggin's. Look at that boss, stranger; don't he look so he'd traveled?"

"He does, indeed," admitted the miner king.

"Waal, you might say he has. I've rid him all ther way from Baston—"

"What? Hold on there!"

"I wouldn't lie for a farm," asserted the queer little man with the saddle-bags. "Bugs—that's my boss, who's a mustang—knows more'n some humans. Thanky, no, boss; I don't smoke, nother. Promised Aunt Jerusha, who was a mother tew me, thet I'd never commit none o' the fashionable vices o' the day, and I've kept my word. Aunt Jerusha's with ther angels now, and I hev a blessed hope o' meetin' her up there some day, with clean garments. But I'll walk in, sart'inly, and look over the boardin'-house."

And the Yankee, saddle-bags in hand, followed the proprietor of the "Miner's Paradise" inside, and was shown through the building, which was two stories in height and of good dimensions on the ground. There was but one woman about the place—a yellow, haggish, Mexican female, who acted as housekeeper and manager for the miner boss.

The Yankee seemed pleased with the place,

secured a room, and agreed to stay for a time at least. He gave his name as Pete Homespun; but Yankee Pete was how he had been hailed since crossing the Mississippi, and this name was destined to stick.

"I need a leetle rest and recooperation," said the Yankee, after he had examined his new quarters; "so, ef it's all the same to yeou, I won't put out my shingle jest naow."

"You can do as you like, Yankee," answered Lapstone. "I don't think you'll care to remain here long. You're too tenderfooted. Men don't like such critters."

"Mebbe they will when they're in diffikilty," was the Yankee's rejoinder.

Then he went to the stable to look after Bugs, and from the stable he sauntered about the old yet new village, his keen blue eyes taking in everything worthy of note.

"I am not mistaken in the man," muttered Yankee Pete, as he walked leisurely toward the north end of Quartzville. "He has changed wonderfully from the reckless boy of long ago, but Rung Lapstone is the Harris Maltby for whom I have sought. I mistrusted it when I heerd of the man; I have satisfied myself now. What a stout villain he has grown to be! I wonder if the sins of the past do not haunt him? Ah! Harris Maltby, the day of reckoning will come before long—before long."

The last words came forth flutteringly from the bosom that covered a troubled heart, and Yankee Pete walked on, with hands clasped behind him, until he stood high up in the hills beyond the town.

In the mean time, Rung Lapstone had discovered something that gave him food for reflection. On returning to the little room just off from the saloon, which he denominated his office, he found a bit of folded paper tucked under the door.

On opening it, he read:

"Harris Maltby, where is Marion Wixwalter—where her babies? A Nemesis is following you, and will yet demand an answer."

Simple questions surely, yet to Rung Lapstone they brought memories of another time. He clutched at his throat, and seemed choking with a suddenly aroused emotion. He soon regained composure, however, and crushing the note, thrust it into his pocket, a low, muttered oath falling from his lips.

"Who in Satan has been here?" he growled. "It must be the Indian. I had not thought of him, but it was in this neighborhood that I left the woman in his keeping."

He went to the bar-room, quaffed a huge glass of brandy, and then questioned Jake, the bartender, as to strangers being about; but the bloated whisky-slinger had seen no one out of the ordinary. As the miner boss stepped outside, however, he met a personage who quite startled him for the moment.

CHAPTER VI.

LAPSTONE AND INDIAN JOE.

A TALL, slender personage stood on the veranda, a man clad in a semi-civilized garb, whose face was unmistakably Indian. He was the person Rung Lapstone had called to mind soon after reading the warning note.

"Indian Joe!" ejaculated the miner boss, starting back, and staring fixedly at the dark apparition.

"I heerd you had come, jest a little while ago," uttered the half-breed in good English. "Me think best to call on you. Mebbe you like know somethin' 'bout the white squaw."

"Hist!" cried Lapstone warningly. "Yes, of course. Come this way," and the miner boss led the way across the saloon to his office. After closing the door, he turned upon Indian Joe with a black frown, and seemed waiting for him to speak.

Quietly the half-breed sunk to a seat, crossed his thin legs, and looked steadily into the face of the bearded boss of Quartzville, without uttering a word.

There was a craftiness in the face of Indian Joe, or Joe Pewomo, that none could mistake. He had the cunning of the fox, with the courage of the grizzly, a fact that Rung Lapstone had long since discovered.

"Well," finally articulated the bearded miner, "why are you here, Joe Pewomo?"

"To see you."

"Unquestionably, but why did you wish to see me?"

"About white squaw."

"Well?"

"She is dead."

"Dead! Marion Wixwalter dead?"

There was an exultant ring in the man's voice that did not escape the notice of the crafty half-breed, but he seemed unmoved by it; he was as stolid as the mountains of his native land.

"You are pleased—much glad?" and the black orbs of Indian Joe gleamed with a queer, scintillating light, as he watched the face of the miner boss.

"I could not be otherwise," and a smile opened the beard of Rung Lapstone. "It was you who sent or brought this. You thought to frighten me. Ha! ha!" and the mine-owner

drew forth the crumpled note and laid it in Joe Pewomo's dark palm.

"What this to me? I can't read."

"Oh-ho! is that true?"

Lapstone read the few words the note contained, then fixed his gaze sharply on the half-breed's face.

"You sent that, Joe?"

But the thin old half-breed shook his head in a way that could not be mistaken.

"Me know nothing 'bout it," grunted Indian Joe. "Some one try to scare you me think."

"True," grated Lapstone; "but *who* under the bright sun knew of this? No one but you, Joe Pewomo, unless you have blabbed. If you have, I'll make short work of closing your mouth," and he tapped the haft of a bowie that hung beside a revolver at his hip.

"Indian Joe not scared," grunted Pewomo, in a tone of defiance, low and soft though it was. "Me come to you, to others me tell nothing. Now squaw is dead, me want money."

A sneer curled the lip of Rung Lapstone.

"Money! Well, now, that's good. No, Injin, you've had the last cent from me you will ever get. Let the dead rest in peace; our accounts are forever settled, Joe Pewomo, and if ever you come round after this day, whining for money, I'll horsewhip you."

"Me hear you good hand with *whip*!" was the half-breed's retort. "Mebbe you like kill some folks wid it, eh?"

The keen black eyes of Indian Joe were fixed on the face of the miner boss in keen scrutiny, as he uttered the words that brought back the scene at the tree, one night, eighteen months before, when, under the lash, Little Gaudy writhed, and whose spirit was divorced from the body at his hands.

Naturally the miner boss was not pleased at the hint let fall by Indian Joe. It was evident that some one of his partisans had been too open-mouthed. An oath fell from the lips of Rung Lapstone.

"It may be. I am capable of cutting your heart out with the whip," uttered the speculator, with a black scowl. "I don't care to see you about here again."

Rung Lapstone drew a double-eagle from his pocket and tossed it to the palm of Indian Joe, who covered it with an eager quickness that brought a smile in place of the scowl, to Lapstone's face.

"Take that and begone, Injin."

But the half-breed was not to be thus disposed of.

"White man rich; make much money; gold all about—he own it all; think Joe take leetle bit like dis?" and a scornful laugh fell from the thin lips of the yellow mountaineer.

"You seem to have corraled it," sneered Rung. "I never promised you anything. The woman being dead, what care I for you or your blabbing tongue?"

"Mebbe you find out different," growled Pewomo, showing white teeth in anger. "If the white squaw dead, somebody live who make it warm for you, he know how white squaw been treated by you."

"What you driving at, you old fool?"

"Dis; John Wixwalter like know something."

"John Wixwalter?"

The careless, sneering actions of Rung Lapstone vanished as if by magic, and a cloud swept his face. He glared at the thin form of the half-breed, with a savage questioning, in which a particle of fear was visible.

For the first time a smile touched the face of Indian Joe. He felt that he had touched the miner boss in a tender spot. He realized that Rung Lapstone would be more in a questioning than a threatening mood hereafter.

"What are you talking about, you old fool?" finally spoke the miner boss. "John Wixwalter perished in Southern California years ago. He will never come to question me as to my stewardship. You are trying to work upon my fears, but let me tell you, 'twon't go down, Injun, I swear it won't. Again I tell you to go, and never annoy me with your presence again."

The half-breed rose slowly, and turned to the door. Here he paused and cast a look of crafty triumph into the face of his former employer.

"Me go. John Wixwalter come soon to see you."

"Stop. Why will you blab of Wixwalter? Surely he is not alive—"

"Ef you tink so, all right," chuckled Pewomo, lifting the latch. But he was not permitted to go out. He had hinted at something that caused Rung Lapstone a nervous spell, and he dared not permit his Indian tool to go until he knew more regarding John Wixwalter's fate.

The smile vanished from the face of Pewomo as he resumed his seat, crossed his thin legs, and looked up from under his black brows at the countenance of Rung Lapstone, the anxious miner boss.

"John Wixwalter's alive and at Cape Horn!"

This was the answer the half-breed gave to the eager questioning of the miner. It was startling news to the man who was monarch of Quartzville. His countenance assumed a green hue as he listened. He had not been at Cape

Horn in six months. During the time Colonel Wixwalter had come and established himself.

This was the information given by Indian Joe.

It had an effect on Lapstone that was wonderful. His old, insolent assurance was gone like magic, and he was quite on sociable terms with the despised half-breed now.

"The woman is dead, you tell me?" finally said Lapstone. "Now, you are sure of this—there is no mistake?"

"No mistake," asserted Pewomo. "Me show you grave, you come up."

"I will come up soon, to-morrow, perhaps," returned Lapstone. "One other thing. Does this Colonel Wixwalter know anything of the woman—of her fate?"

For an instant the half-breed hesitated. A crafty look stole into his eyes, and he seemed at a loss how to answer; but when he caught the sharp glance of Rung Lapstone fixed on his face he knew it would never do to hesitate long.

"No; I keep the secret."

"It is well. You're a jewel, Joe Pewomo. You must forgive my haste and anger a little bit ago. I see now that I wronged you. Yes, I'll come up soon, and see about the poor woman's last resting-place, and fix up matters. Is the good mother still in health?"

Quite a change had come over the mine-owner, but it did not blind Joe Pewomo to the truth. At the outset of their interview, Rung Lapstone had exhibited his true feelings, now he was masking them, a patent fact to Indian Joe.

"Pewomo's squaw tough," answered the half-breed, with a feeling of contempt that his solemn countenance failed to reveal.

The interview was soon after terminated, and Lapstone was left alone. The moment the lean half-breed had placed his form outside the door, Rung Lapstone gave vent to a string of oaths that would have done honor to the army in Flanders.

He paced the floor with clinched hands, and champed his teeth with a grating fury that would have led the bartender to suspect his master raving mad had he looked in upon him just then. But he did not look in; he could not if he would, since Lapstone had locked the door immediately on the departure of Indian Joe.

"Murderation! So Jack Wixwalter is at Cape Horn. How in the fiend's name did he come to find his way into this region? I certainly did hear that he died, or was killed near San Benito a long time ago. There must be some mistake. But no, Indian Joe would know if he had seen him. Well, I'm thankful that the colonel, as he calls himself, does not know the part I acted in a little tragic drama that intimately concerned him, years ago. I must give him a call some day, and talk over old times, that is, providing he recognizes me."

The mad anger of the miner boss cooled suddenly, as he felt that the danger was not imminent after all. He had fled from Sure Deal to escape the avenger who had slain Dan Bryne and Hi Parker. One year and a half had passed, and the hand of the avenger was stayed. That avenger could be no one but Samson Hyte, and he had doubtless given up the trail long since. Had he? We shall see. When the miner passed out he met Yankee Pete face to face.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WORK OF KINKFOOT KARL.

RUNG LAPSTONE started back as though he had seen a ghost. His feelings were highly wrought upon by the revelation made by Indian Joe, and to thus find himself unexpectedly confronted by the meek visage of the Yankee, though but little in itself, was enough to raise the ire of the miner boss.

"Jewhilkins!"

This was the only word let fall by Yankee Pete, as he gazed into the clouded face of his host.

"You durn snooping Yankee, what are you doing here?" snarled Lapstone, seizing the representative of New England by the shoulder, and shaking him until his teeth rattled like castanets. "I've a notion to strangle you!"

"Good Jerusha! don't dew it, mister," cried Yankee Pete, holding up his hands in mute supplication. "I didn't go for to dew nowthin' wrong, I sw'ar I didn't. Ef you'll let it pass, I'll treat to ther best liquor the house affords, I swan I will," and at the last, the Yankee gazed appealingly at several rough-looking men who had just entered, and were swaggering toward the bar.

"Heigho! let the yaller bird treat—he's a good 'un," cried one of the men. A general laugh followed, and Lapstone caught the "sense of the meeting," and pushed the little Yankee toward the bar.

"Treat the boys then, and see't you behave yourself hereafter."

With the words, the mine-owner strode out into the sunshine, leaving Yankee Pete with the three toughs who had just entered, for tough they were to look at, to say the least. Stout, long-haired, bearded villains, each one having a revolver and knife strapped to him.

They were not unknown in Quartzville, however. The leader of the trio, the "hard pet" of the crew, was called Whetstone Dave. His two companions were brothers, Benson by name; Jeff and Bill Benson having a bad reputation among reputable miners. They were friends of the mine-owner in one sense, however, having accompanied him from Sure Deal, on his wanderings about the western country.

Since his prominence in Quartzville, however, Rung Lapstone had cut loose from many of his old associates, a fact that did not tend to insure the best of feeling.

"The leetle yaller pard's treat. Ho, ho! Gi'n us the stiffest lick in the house, Jake."

Black bottles were set out, and the trio leaned against the bar, each pouring out his whisky in turn. When this was done, Whetstone Dave raised his glass with an oath, but just before the glass touched his lips, he paused and glared fixedly at the top of the bar.

The fourth glass remained empty, and Yankee Pete was gliding toward the door, a circumstance that at once roused the ire of Whetstone Dave. Quickly he set down his whisky and jerked his revolver.

"Hold up thar, yaller pard, hold up I say, or I'll fill yer hide so full of holes 'twon't be wu'th nothin' 'ceptin' fur a sieve."

Covered by the revolver, Yankee Pete came at once to a halt.

"Jewhilkins! folks, w'at's wanted?"

The Yankee faced the toughs with a sickly smile on his not handsome countenance. Perhaps he was a little nervous, since he seemed to shiver all over when he caught the glowing eyes of the tough fixed on his face.

"Look thar, you haven't teched the lick," and the grimy finger of Whetstone Dave's left hand pointed at the empty glass on the bar, while his revolver covered the heart of Yankee Pete.

"Oh, yaas, I see," uttered Yankee Pete, and he laughed good-humoredly. "I don't drink, pards; I hain't that kind. I was brought up on a farm near Bawston, and my folks was pious folks, they was. Yeou are nice-lookin' gentlemen, and sense I pay for the drinks, I know yeou'll let me off."

"But we won't. You've got ter swaller some o' this p'izen, or eat lead fur dinner, which is powerful hard ter digest," uttered Whetstone Dave, with a grim oath.

It was a trying situation for Yankee Pete. He dared not move toward the door now; to do so would prove fatal. He must appease the brutal rough in some way, since the Yankee believed himself no match for the trio of scoundrels before him. He was, even were he sure of victory, averse at this time to engaging in a quarrel.

Back to the bar he walked; but he had resolved not to drink the liquor. Again he made excuses.

"I told Aunt Jerusha I wouldn't drink a tarnel drop o' lick, an' she's with the angels now, and 'twould be a shame to break a promise made to ther dying. Here," and he flung a gold eagle on the bar, "take that out in drinks. I hain't one o' the measley kind of Yankees yeou read about, naw I ain't."

Once more Yankee Pete turned on his heel, but he was not permitted to go. Whetstone Dave sprang forward and clutched the slim Yankee's coat-collar, and jerked him violently toward the bar.

"Bring ther lick, Bill; we'll see ef a durn yaller cuss from Bawsting's a-goin' ter make us chew words. You weazen-faced son o' Vermont, I'll make yer guzzle cold p'izen, or chew lead. Ho, ho!"

Of course the bartender did not interfere. It was not his business to look after other people's quarrels. Instead, he seemed highly pleased just now, and grinned like a monkey in a menagerie.

Bill Benson advanced with a brimming glass of whisky, and Whetstone Dave circled Yankee Pete with his arms, holding him fast in a grip of iron, his bearded face crushed down against the hollow cheek of his prisoner, the fumes of his tobacco and whisky-laden breath filling the Yankee's nostrils.

"Now swaller the p'izen, you yaller imp."

None of the trio heard or saw the horseman who rode to the door and dismounted just as Whetstone Dave threw his arms about the slim Yankee.

A man, undersized, yet of a powerful frame, alighted on the veranda. No one was without, and the new-comer allowed his horse to stand without hitching, while he turned toward the door, which stood open.

A wide-brimmed hat shaded the face of the new-comer, while over his shoulders a parti-colored cloak hung loosely. The dress of the man was Mexican, and the keen, piercing black eyes, that shone from under the sombrero, together with the long, black hair, flowing to his shoulders, indicated his nationality as plainly as his dress. A huge mustache, inky black, swept away from his lip, until the ends touched his shoulders on either side.

As the Mexican stood in the doorway the sight that met his gaze was one that was calculated

to excite various emotions in the human breast. The scene was rather comical, yet withal most brutal.

Yankee Pete, completely at the mercy of the three toughs, stood the very picture of mortal terror, while Bill Benson was about to force a glass of whisky down his throat.

"Make 'im swaller ther p'izen, ther yaller runt," hissed Whetstone Dave, with an oath that was sulphurous in its brutality.

"I won't, no I won't. Take the lick away," cried out Yankee Pete, with a comical grimace, as the glass was passed to his close-shut teeth.

A loud laugh went up from Jeff Benson, and the bartender; the former leaning back against the counter and opening his dog-like jaws, until the wide, deep cavity, fringed by tobacco-stained teeth, was frightful to behold.

The loud "haw-haw!" of the tough came to a sudden and unexpected termination. A bright object whistled through the air, followed by a sharp *chug*, and Jeff Benson lay over on the counter, with half his front teeth down his cavernous throat, while the blood spattered out in jets over his ragged beard.

A revolver, well hurled, had accomplished the work, and for some moments the stout villain was unable to recover from the awkward surprise that had so suddenly shut off his laughter.

"Release the Yankee!"

Keen, penetrating as a knife-thrust, came the words, as the Mexican intruder strode into the room. With an oath Whetstone Dave released his hold, while Bill Benson dropped the glass of whisky to the floor and faced about, with one huge paw on his revolver.

"Draw and die!"

A black eye flashed above the glistening barrel of a revolver, and Bill Benson recoiled. He did not draw his pistol.

"Thunderation! Greaser, w'at yer up to?" thundered Whetstone Dave, with the roar of an angry bull. "I'll chaw ye inter mince-meat."

Out leaped the revolver of Whetstone Dave, and a low cry of dismay fell from the lips of the Yankee, when he saw that it covered the heart of the brave Mexican.

But that cry was turned to one of horror the next instant. Three to one was a desperate odds, but the Mexican had not entered the saloon with the idea of being shot down without mercy by the terrible trio in question.

While he covered Bill Benson with his revolver, his other hand was not idle; the haft of a bowie filled it, and on the instant that Whetstone Dave's revolver, cocked and ready to explode, came to a level, a keen blade shot through the air, followed instantly by a thud, and Whetstone Dave sunk to the floor a corpse, his brain split by the huge bowie of the stranger.

It was a terrible sight, and Yankee Pete reeled from the room with a horrified cry. With the lightning leap of a catamount, the Mexican was upon Bill Benson, and with the butt of his revolver felled him to the floor.

Then the little man turned upon Jeff Benson, who was just recovering from the blow in the mouth.

He did not seem to relish a "tussle" with the stranger, but, with a yell of dismay, he dashed to the door and disappeared.

The Mexican secured his second revolver, the one that had bumped the first brother so effectually, and thrusting both into his belt, he turned upon the stunned and bewildered Jake.

"Tell your master when he comes that Kinkfoot Karl has left his compliments." The Mexican pointed to the dead man, in whose brain the bowie still remained, then lifted his sombrero, and with a bow and a smile, departed.

A moment later he went dashing away on his fleet steed, as he had come, and soon left Quartzville far behind him.

CHAPTER VIII.

SAMSON HYTE REAPPEARS.

DOWN a mountain trail dashed Kinkfoot Karl, at a rate of speed that threatened each moment to hurl horse and rider to destruction.

The little man who bestrode the gallant prairie steed was used to danger in every form. His horse's feet seemed to spurn the rocky pathway, and when deep gulches on the one hand and towering cliffs on the other were met with, the pace of the animal alone slackened.

Passing through a narrow canyon, some half a mile in extent, horse and rider debouched upon a level plateau, where grass grew, and a few stunted trees stood up like sentinels, keeping watch and ward over the entrance to Deadfall Canyon as the place had been named, years before the opening of this story.

A man, bearded and not ill-looking, stepped from a tree and confronted the horseman, as he drew his horse down to a walk; then Kinkfoot drew rein shortly.

"Ah, you are here on time, Nick."

"Yes. Have ye been to Quartzville, captain?"

"I have; but I did not meet Rung Lapstone. I left my mark, however. The demon of Sure Deal will know that Kinkfoot Karl has found him out, and that his vengeance never sleeps."

The black eyes of the horseman fell to his

stirrup, where his right foot, crooked and ill-shaped, touched the foot-rest. A bullet had shattered that foot in the long-ago, and it had never been anything but an awkward club afterward. Once the boy had felt grieved over his deformity. Of late years, however, he had learned to look upon it with pride. This deformity, accidental though it was, had given him his name, the only name by which he was known in the West.

Kinkfoot Karl looked up, after a moment's musing, and said:

"Rung Lapstone has intrenched himself strongly in Quartzville. He believes himself beyond danger. He little knows that the avenger of Little Gaudy is on his tracks. I have picked my men well, and Quartzville, all those at least who are friendly to Lapstone, shall learn to tremble at the name of Kinkfoot Karl."

"Many of the boys expect to find gold when Quartzville is laid in ruins."

"There will be gold in plenty," returned Kinkfoot Karl, stroking his huge mustache with one small hand. "The demon of Sure Deal, who has revived the mining interests of Quartzville, is rich. Eighteen months ago he robbed his partner of a cool twenty thousand in dust and nuggets, and scourged Little Gaudy to death because he would not confess to the stealing. I know the whole black story. On the very night of the crime, Dan Bryne fell—he was one of sixteen who saw the boy die for Rung Lapstone's crime. Several of the bloody fiends have fallen since that day. Each one has been called away prematurely."

"Others will follow, and at the last, Rung Lapstone goes after his comrades. His wealth, ill-gotten as it was, shall go to the boys, the last penny. As for me, I ask only revenge."

The thin lips of the mounted man were compressed, and a deep-red glow smoldered in his black eyes as he finished. He tightened his rein and lifted his eyes, gazing straight ahead.

"I had some thought of visiting Cape Horn to-night," he said, after a thoughtful moment.

"Is it safe for you there, captain?"

"Quit safe," answered Kinkfoot. "Colonel Wixwaller is my friend. I am always on my guard, and—"

"A man in love is usually incautious," interrupted Nick Overton, with a half-smile. The angry frown that touched the face of his captain, however, sufficed to kill the smile at once.

"Love is something that is a stranger to my heart," said Kinkfoot Karl, after a moment. "I loved one individual alone in the wide world, and him Rung Lapstone killed with the fiendish cruelty of a demon. My hand aches to tarrotle him, yet I must bide my time. My vengeance is slow but sure, and the king of Quartzville will feel the weight of my good right hand when he little expects it. But enough of this. I saw a queer-looking specimen to-day, at the Miner's Paradise. Did you ever meet him? He looks much like a Yankee."

"No. But stay; let me see," muttered Nick Overton. "I did meet a queer fellow on a little mustang t'other day. A yaller-haired feller, wearin' a white plug hat."

"Exactly; that's the man."

"He calls himself Pete Homespun from near Boston."

A look of incredulity touched the face of Kinkfoot Karl.

"Go West, young man. He's a made up Yankee, or I am no reader of character. Perhaps he's a detective in disguise; I must know more of him."

Then the Mexican glanced backward toward the dark mouth of the canyon, and bent his head in a listening attitude.

Along the hard bottom of the gulch came the clatter of hoofs. A single horseman was approaching at a fair rate of speed. A giant boulder loomed up on the level plot a little way off, and behind this Kinkfoot Karl guided his horse. Then he slipped to the ground and found his concealment perfect.

Nick Overton had followed his example, and here the twain waited the approach of the horseman in breathless silence.

They had not long to wait.

Out from the shadow of the canyon shot a horseman, and, strange as it may seem, came to a halt on the very spot occupied but a short time before by Kinkfoot Karl.

A stout man, beardless and young, wearing a hunting-frock and breeches of buckskin, a broad, slouch hat covering his head, and shading his face. A gun was slung to his back, knife and brace of revolvers in his belt.

"By Harry! it can't be many miles ter Cape Horn," said the horseman aloud. "I have some idea that I would like to see old Lapstone once more. Them was strange occurrences that drove ther miner out of Sure Deal. I always sp'ioned that he got the left o' the money thet Little Gaudy died fur not lyin' about."

The words came distinctly to the ears of Kinkfoot Karl, and the sound seemed not unfamiliar.

"I've met that man before. He is from Sure Deal. Hal! he is moving away. I will halt him now, and see of what mettle he is made. Halt there! Hands up!"

With the words, Kinkfoot Karl sprung from

behind the boulder, and covered the breast of the horseman with a brace of pistols.

The Mexican expected to see the traveler start with fear, but in this he was disappointed. A smile shot over the ruddy face of the stranger as he said:

"You've got the drop on me this time, pard, so I yield. What yer want? Gold? Hain't an ounce o' ther stuff on my corpus. Greenbacks? Hain't seen one sence Kinkfoot Karl robbed the stage 'way back on ther south road. I'm poor's a church rat; nary red, nor nothing but my good looks and nice clothes. Ef you want them you'll hev ter come and take 'em."

Utterly cool was the man on the horse, which was a bay gelding of beautiful build, and whose neat proportions quite attracted the eye of Kinkfoot Karl.

"Dismount," commanded the seeming Mexican, in a steely voice.

"Down it is," and the man slipped to the ground.

Not an instant were the eyes of the outlaw removed from the face of his victim. A low whistle brought Nick Overton upon the scene, who, at the command of his captain, disarmed the mountaineer.

"You have a splendid horse, which we will appropriate," pursued Kinkfoot Karl. "As for gold and greenbacks, I care nothing; I do not need them at present."

"By gracious! Greaser, don't take my horse. I—"

"Hold your tongue," admonished Kinkfoot Karl sharply.

"You ought to be thankful to escape with your life. Do you know who I am?"

"No, but I can guess," answered the man.

"Well?"

"That miserable robber, Kinkfoot Karl."

A low laugh dropped from the lips of the Mexican.

"I am Kinkfoot Karl, but neither robber nor ruffian. I will pay you for your horse. What is he worth?" and Kinkfoot Karl drew out a heavy purse, and began to count out bright gold eagles.

"Stop," commanded the man. "Don't insult me with that dross. I wouldn't part with that nag fur money. Ef you've got ter hev Storm, take him, but don't offer me money."

The man seemed to be in earnest, and a surprised look swept the face of Kinkfoot Karl.

"You value your horse very highly," he said. "I never yet saw a man who wouldn't sell for some price. I'll give you a thousand dollars—"

"No. Rob me if you will, but I won't sell Storm," the man interrupted quickly. "Only by force will you git the bay."

"Who in Satan are you?—the most peculiar genius I ever run afoul of, I can swear to that."

"I'm Samson Hyte at yer service, as good a man as ever rid ther Western plains, or drew bead on a Injun or white coyote. I—"

"Samson Hyte!"

The hand of Kinkfoot Karl was instantly extended, while a surprised and pleased look swept the dark face of the young mountain outlaw.

"Shake, pard. I know you now. You are from Sure Deal."

"Once I was thar. Sence they murdered Little Gaudy, I turned my back on ther town. I'm a rambler now; a sort o' Gulliver on hoss-back, I take it," and Samson laughed good-naturedly.

"You're welcome to keep your horse, Samson," said Karl. "You befriended Little Gaudy, but Rung Lapstone and his ruffians murdered him in spite of you. I was not far off. I learned all. Little Gaudy was my friend, and I am on the trail of his assassins; they shall all bite the dust. Nick, give the gentleman his weapons. You are free. Go on, sir, and may God prosper you. I made a mistake, that is all. Hereafter, when you hear men speak ill of Kinkfoot Karl, tell them he ain't so bad's he's painted."

Once more Samson Hyte was in the saddle. Puzzled and astounded, he rode away toward Cape Horn, like one in a dream.

Nick was puzzled, too, and questioned his captain.

"It don't matter. Samson Hyte's a man every time, and he is my friend."

And this was all the explanation the young outlaw would give.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BLADE OF DEATH.

RUNG LAPSTONE had seen the Mexican ride away after his terrible work in the saloon, but as he was some distance from the tavern, he never suspected what had happened until Jake came out on the veranda and gesticulated wildly, at the same time setting up a dismal howl that would have done credit to an Apache squaw mourning her dead.

The miner boss hurried back to his ranch, and the moment he crossed the threshold, was made aware of the situation.

An oath fell from his lips when his gaze rested on the corpse of Whetstone Dave. Bill Benson was just staggering to his feet with swollen head, the effects of the blow given him by the butt of Kinkfoot's revolver.

"St. Jago! what does this mean?" demanded the mine-owner sternly.

"It means thet Whetstone Dave ar' done for," articulated Bill Benson in answer.

"Yes, but who put him down?"

"A durn Greaser."

"Ah!"

The truth flashed upon the brain of Rung Lapstone with stunning force. At first he had feared that the Unseen Slayer, who had driven him from Sure Deal, was again on his track, but he was greatly relieved to learn that such was not the case.

Bill Benson, in his characteristic way, gave a graphic account of the trouble he and his pard had had with Yankee Pete, and of the sudden interference of the man who wore the dress of a Mexican, but did not talk like one.

"He war the durnedest swiftest man I ever see'd," concluded Bill. "He c'u'd shoot, strike an' stab all to onc't."

The mine-owner fell to musing a moment.

"It must be he," was his final comment.

"What's that, pard?"

"It was Kinkfoot Karl who killed Whetstone Dave. I am convinced of it. I did not know that he was in these parts. He may give us some trouble. I learn that he has been operating south of Cape Horn quite extensively. I wish you'd winged the villain, Bill."

"Winged ther devil!" exclaimed Bill. "I tried ter bad 'nough, but ther cuss were quicker'n greased chain-lightnin', he wor. It took er man wi' a full hand ter git away wi' Whetstone Dave, but that leetle critter did it as easy's nothin'."

The name of Kinkfoot Karl was not new to the mine-owner. From numerous sources he had heard of the wonderful scourge of the mountains; of his generous deeds, as well as his impudent robberies.

He was a chivalrous outlaw, and report said never robbed a lady or a miner. Speculators and gamblers alone fell under his greed. Such were the stories, whether true or false Lapstone did not know. He had never met the Mountain Scourge, unless this Mexican was the one, and the mine-owner was pretty thoroughly convinced that the Scourge had at last left his mark in Quartzville.

Soon Jeff Benson returned with the blood washed from his face, minus his front teeth, and swearing mad. His estimate of the little Mexican's prowess was even greater than his brother's.

"The gol-darn powerfulest man this side ther Mississipp'," was his assertion, while at the same time the tough was vowing to shoot the "durn Greaser" on sight.

The body of Whetstone Dave was removed to the outside of the building and laid on the veranda, the huge bowie still where the hand of Kinkfoot Karl had sent it, an object of wonder and horror to all who chanced to view it.

When night came, a large crowd of miners and toughs gathered in and about Miner's Paradise. The news of Whetstone Dave's death spread rapidly, and fully two-score brawny men gathered about the dead and commented on his strange taking-off.

The name of Kinkfoot Karl was bandied about, and treated with hisses and curses. A bonfire illumined the street, the bearded faces and gleaming weapons that were displayed.

Whetstone Dave had been considered one of the hardest men in Quartzville; a sure shot, and a giant in strength—yet he had been easily conquered, even when he had the assistance of the brothers Benson, no mean team in themselves.

Jeff Benson had lost his teeth, and his mouth was extremely sore, yet he would talk, and in a manner that proclaimed his determination to have revenge for his hurts. In his mind, however, Yankee Pete was equally to blame, for his misfortunes, with the Mexican outlaw.

"Boys, whar's Yankee Pete?"

This question Jeff Benson hurled at his mates, but the name was a new one to them, since the little Yankee had been but a few hours in Quartzville.

At an upper window, overlooking the noisy scene without, was a face pressed against the glass—the face of Yankee Pete.

"It is horrible—horrible!" muttered the man.

"I have nerved myself to go through everything to win. I haven't yet had time to investigate the secrets of this ranch. I dare not make an open demand of Lapstone; my plans would fail then utterly, but—"

The Yankee's soliloquy was cut short by the loud words of Jeff Benson, that came up plainly to his ear.

"The dum Yankee's up thar, an', pards, he's guilty o' 'sistin' ter put Whetstone Dave under. Shell we fetch him out?"

"Fetch 'im out!"

"Lynch the cuss!"

Such shouts came with terrible distinctness to the ears of Yankee Pete. Instantly he realized his danger, and prepared to meet it boldly.

"They must not find Yankee Pete here when they come," muttered the man quietly, going to his saddle-bags and removing a bundle from their depths, and then passing quickly to the door.

Five minutes later half a dozen toughs, led

by Jeff Benson, came stamping and swearing into the upper region of the house. Yankee Pete's room had been pointed out to the roughs by Rung Lapstone, who cared little for the Yankee, and believed, perhaps, it would help his plans to have the mob execute summary vengeance on the fellow who had indirectly been the cause of Whetstone Dave's death.

With a mad rush the toughs gained the door of the Yankee's room, and pushed it open. The glare from the fire without filled the room, causing the lamp carried by Benson to pale in comparison.

"He ain't here!" howled Benson, in disappointment.

"He'd be a durn fool ter stay arter the racket we've made," cried one of the toughs, suggestively.

"True enough; but he can't be far off. I'll jest ask ther female we met ef she's seen the critter."

A woman, with gray hair and bent form, stood at one end of the little hall as the ruffians came out of the Yankee's room. Jeff Benson at once advanced upon her, with a demand to know the whereabouts of Pete Homespun.

"Gentlemen, do you speak of the little man with yellow hair and—"

"Yes, yes, he's ther chap," was the eager interruption.

"That man jest went down, not two minutes before you come up, gentlemen. I think he said he was going to speak to Mr. Lapstone."

"Hal then we'll gobble ther cuss yet. Let's go slow pards, an' not make sich an al-fired racket. Down the stairs went the toughs, and then the old woman glided swiftly to the room they had just vacated.

Benson and his pards hunted some minutes before they found Rung Lapstone, when he inquired as to their success.

"The Yankee wa'n't thar," said Jeff Benson, "but ther old woman said he'd come down ter see you."

"The old woman?—Carabel?"

"Durn'd ef I know. She war gray's a badger, an' looked peaked like."

"There's no such woman in this ranch," uttered the mine-owner. "Carabel is wrinkled, but not gray; instead, her hair's black as Satan's dominions. It's my opinion, gents, that you've been sold," and Lapstone laughed, since he cared little whether the eccentric Yankee doctor fell into the hands of the would-be avengers of the dead Whetstone Dave or not. If the Yankee had outwitted them, they had no one to blame but themselves.

A furious oath fell from the lips of Jeff Benson.

"Come, boys, quick! let's see ther old gal ag'in."

Away dashed the roughs, and were soon climbing to the upper regions of the Miner's Paradise. The Yankee's room was empty, and even the saddle-bags were gone. The hall was empty, too. Crestfallen, and swearing furiously, the man-hunters dashed below once more. A low laugh greeted them, as they gained the lower hall. It came from the lips of Carabel, the Mexican housekeeper.

"He's gone, and you are a pack of fools," she said with a chuckle.

"Gone! Did you see the yaller hair-pin?" and Jeff Benson turned hissing upon the housekeeper.

"Hark!"

The clatter of horse-hoofs fell on the ear of the group gathered in the hall. Quickly Jeff Benson sprang to the veranda, followed by his pards, just as a wild yell rose from the throats of the assembled Quartzvillians in front of the tavern.

Just discernible in the light of the bonfire, was a horse and rider speeding away into the darkness. The streaming yellow hair, surmounted by the bell-crowned white hat, could not be mistaken. With an oath Jeff Benson sprang down the steps.

"There goes the durn Yankee. Shoot! shoot! Don't let ther cuss git away!"

A few shots were fired from ready revolvers, but they flew wide of the mark; the Yankee had disappeared from sight, and even the clatter of his hoofs was no longer heard.

Rung Lapstone stood on the veranda watching the movements of the parties. He saw the wildly gesticulating Jeff Benson; saw him wave his hands aloft in the firelight, and heard his mad oaths, and then a bright object whistled through the air, a sickening sound followed, and the next instant Jeff Benson sunk quivering and dying to the ground.

As his comrades gathered about, they uttered a simultaneous cry of horror. A huge bowie blade had cleft the brain of Benson, killing him instantly!

CHAPTER X.

THE SURPRISE PARTY.

THE loud noise that filled the air about Quartzville's main tavern became suddenly hushed.

Like one petrified, Rung Lapstone gazed upon his bleeding friend, one of the original miners of Sure Deal, who had died as had Whetstone Dave.

"Murder!"

The cry was taken up, and echoed through the crowd, in accents of mingled rage and horror.

Who had hurled the deadly bowie? Not the Yankee, surely. Had they a traitor among them? No; but it was undoubtedly the same hand that sent the blade of death through the brain of Whetstone Dave.

Bill Benson stood white and trembling over the corpse of his brother. Reaching down, he attempted to draw forth the weapon of death, but it clung to the skull with wonderful tenacity. He was compelled to place his foot against the head ere he could accomplish his object.

Waving the bloody blade aloft, Bill Benson cried:

"This 'ere weepin' shell find the heart o' ther man as killed poor Jeff!"

Groans and cheers followed. Strong hands lifted the dead tough and laid the body beside the other, on the veranda, from the head of which the bowie still protruded.

This was removed now, and the knives compared.

They were mates, surely, although the last one seemed a trifle the heavier of the two. Rung Lapstone called a small, dark-featured man from the crowd, and requested him to follow. Soon the two were closeted together in the mine-owner's office.

"Bob Andrews, what think you of this night's work?" questioned Rung Lapstone, the moment he was alone with the man.

"It's bad business," answered the man, who seemed to be a person of more than ordinary intelligence. "Two of our friends killed in one day by—whom?"

"We know that Kinkfoot Karl killed Whetstone Dave."

"Well, then, it's easy to point ther finger at the chap who give Benson his quieters."

"Well?"

"Kinkfoot Karl of course."

"True, but who is Kinkfoot Karl?" uttered the mine-owner in a deep voice, that seemed to shake a trifle at the last.

"Well, a robber, road-agent, or whatever ye'r pleased ter call him," answered Andrews. "I s'pose he's a highflyer, a bad man of the mountain, a terror to honest men such as you 'n me, pard," and Mr. Andrews gave vent to a low laugh, a trifle sarcastic, at the last.

But deep gravity sat upon the face of the mine-owner as he laid his hand upon the arm of his confederate.

"Bob Andrews, when we put Little Gaudy under for stealing and then lying about it, eighteen months ago, there was one man who refused to assist in the work. You remember this?"

"Yes."

"And that very night Dan Bryne, my well-loved partner, was foully slain—this is not new to you?"

"Sart'in not."

"The assassin then is the assassin now. He has followed us to Quartzville, and is dealing out death on every hand. You understand who I mean?"

"I can think of no one but Samson Hyte."

"He's the man. For some reason he loved Little Gaudy more deeply than we supposed, and he is wreaking vengeance on those who justly put the little dandy under for robbery."

"But Kinkfoot?"

"The two are one and the same; I am sure of it. I am satisfied, too, that the scoundrel has an organized band to help him in his work; moreover, if I am not far out in my reckoning, Cape Horn is the head-quarters of this villain and his band."

It was evident that Bob Andrews was surprised at the announcement made by his superior. Andrews had been with those who witnessed the scourging of the martyred dandy, and remembered the strange death of Rung Lapstone's partner. He had never been satisfied to believe, however, that Samson Hyte was the man who had fired the fatal shot that night, or slain Hi Parker in the cabin afterward.

"What do you perpcose?" finally questioned Andrews, after a minute of profound silence.

"To bury the dead, and then avenge them!" answered Rung Lapstone, grimly. "We must form a Vigilance Committee, and bring Kinkfoot Karl and his abettors to justice."

"I am with you there," and Bob Andrews held out his hand. Soon after this, the interview terminated.

The night passed, and on the following day the two dead toughs were "planted" in the mountain-side, and life moved on with its old pace at Quartzville and vicinity.

Several days passed; a week was gone, during which time Rung Lapstone was absent the greater part of the time, returning only at the close of each day.

A satisfied smile touched his face at the end of the time above mentioned, and he rubbed his hands together gleefully.

"There can be no doubt of it; Kinkfoot and Samson Hyte are the same," he chuckled. "But the strangest part of it all is that Colonel Wix-

walter is on friendly terms with the outlaw. Can it be that the colonel, as he chooses to call himself, is benefited by the robberies committed by this Mountain Scourge? I have an idea that it is so, and it may be that I shall be able to see them both swing.

"The colonel has a pretty daughter. I'm puzzled at this; but Indian Joe has made no mistake. He serves me well, now that I am paying him freely. Well, it is time for the Vigilantes to strike. I'll speak to the boys this night, and will pay Cape Horn a visit."

There was no love lost between the rival mining-towns, and when Rung Lapstone eased himself of his feelings that night, a half-hundred throats cheered him to the echo.

A week had passed with no new developments, but Bill Benson was hot to take the trail in pursuit of the slayer of his brother.

"There will be no pursuit," said Rung Lapstone. "Most any night Kinkfoot can be found at a certain residence in Cape Horn. I wish only a dozen good men to accompany me to-night. We can secure 'the terror,' and bring him to Quartzville for trial and execution."

Then the mine-owner elaborated his plans.

By a means unknown to his friends, Rung Lapstone had learned that Kinkfoot Karl was almost a nightly visitor at Cape Horn, and passed some of his evenings at the house of Colonel Wixwalter, in the outskirts of the town. All that was necessary was to repair to the vicinity after dark, and ambush the daring mountain robber.

The mine-owner's proposition was received with a cheer, and then many of the toughs repaired to the bar to liquor up for the occasion.

That evening twelve men left Quartzville, well mounted, and passing through Deadfall Canyon, rode rapidly toward Cape Horn, with which place Rung Lapstone was utterly familiar.

When within a mile of the place, the party drew aside and, dismounting, secured their horses in a copse, after which they continued the way on foot. They moved with the utmost caution, and in a little time were secreted in the vicinity of a double log cabin, just without the mining-village.

Lights shone from the windows, revealing the fact that the inmates had not retired. A horse, hitched to a post near the house, announced the fact that the man they sought was more than likely within at this very moment.

Slowly the minutes passed to the waiting men. Right well did they understand the desperate character of the man they sought, and they resolved to make sure work and to kill if they could not capture the outlaw.

An hour passed, and then the door opened and a stream of light shot forth. Two men came out and stood in the light, which, however, revealed the face of only one, and he the proprietor of the house.

"My friend, I hope you will succeed, and strike it rich. You have my best wishes for your success, rest assured of that."

It was the voice of Colonel Wixwalter, and Rung Lapstone started at the sound.

"So, so," he muttered, "my old acquaintance is hand and glove with the infamous Mountain Scourge. It is well. I will now have ample excuse for destroying both. The game is playing into my hands better than I could have hoped until this moment."

"You have been very kind to me, colonel," said the man, who stood with his back to the secreted Vigilantes. "I appreciate it, and will endeavor to deserve your trust and good wishes."

"Say no more about it, young man. You must be careful and not clash with Rung Lapstone. I understand that he is as vindictive as he is rich, and is not disposed to look upon newcomers with pleasure, especially when said newcomers are to prove rivals in business."

"I am not afraid to meet him," was the answer, which caused the secreted mine-owner to bug himself with delight at the thought of the startling surprise that awaited the speaker in the near future.

"Rivals in business! Well, that's good," was the mental sneer of the boss of Quartzville. "Comparing this mountain robber with an honorable man like myself; it's outrageous!"

His mental soliloquy was interrupted at this moment by the closing of the cabin door. Colonel Wixwalter had bidden his visitor good-night, and the latter was now striding toward his horse.

The time for action had come.

With a whispered word to his men to make ready to support him at a moment's notice, Rung Lapstone glided forward in the gloom, with a cocked revolver clutched in his hand.

The man had gained his horse, with one foot in the stirrup, when he felt a strong grasp on his shoulder, while a circle of cold steel touched his temple.

"Draw and die!" hissed Rung Lapstone in the ear of the startled visitor.

Then Lapstone gave a sharp whistle, and many forms gathered about the twain in the gloom, one laying hands on the bridle of the horse.

"Great Caesar! what does this mean?" exclaimed the startled man, as he reeled back and faced his foes.

"It means that your little game is played. Your time to die has come; you're at the end of your rope, Kinkfoot Karl!"

CHAPTER XI. A QUEER MISTAKE.

It was a startling situation.

"Who is it speaks the name of Kinkfoot Karl? There's some mistake; I'm not the man," said the stranger, as he gazed about on the assembled roughs, who had gathered at the call of Rung Lapstone.

The miner boss was a little taken aback. He did not know Kinkfoot Karl, but as the reader will remember, he had arrived at the conclusion that the Mountain Scourge and Samson Hyte were one and the same. His faith was shaken now, however.

The man before him was certainly not Samson Hyte, yet, for all, he might be the person he sought.

"You're my prisoner just the same," growled Lapstone.

Just at this instant the cabin door opened, and a light streamed out into the night, revealing the group of toughs plainly. Colonel Wixwalter, who had heard the sound of voices, had at once discovered that something was wrong, and he now stepped outside and confronted the group of Quartzville ruffians.

"Hello! what's the meaning of this, Burril?"

"Duced if I know. A lot of chaps have picked on me for Kinkfoot Karl, and insist that I am that noted worthy."

"A queer mistake, surely," and Colonel Wixwalter advanced and confronted the Quartzvillians. "Gentlemen, this is my friend, Burril Graylock. You will please release him at once."

"By Judas! cunnel, we'll need some at besides your word ter clear the critter," growled Rung Lapstone, disguising his voice for a purpose, although, as many years had passed since he had met Wixwalter, it was not likely that he would recognize him in any event.

"What, you doubt my word? Gracious! man, who are you? Where did you come from? Who are these fellows?"

"Members of the Quartzville Vigilantes," uttered Lapstone sharply. "We propose to break up the gang of robbers that find a nest and aid in Cape Horn. We will take this man back with us. He shall have a fair trial."

"But you shall not take him," cried the colonel; "he is not a member of Kinkfoot Karl's band. Besides, Cape Horn does not ask Quartzville to interfere with her affairs."

A pair of revolvers gleamed in the hands of Colonel Wixwalter at this moment, and Lapstone saw that he had a determined man to deal with. While the miner boss stood hesitating as to what course to pursue, a bright object gleamed through the bar of light that shone from the house, followed by an awful, sickening thud. Bill Benson, who stood at the side of Lapstone, went down as though crushed by a tree.

As he fell, more than one person saw that a bowie had cleft the man's brain.

"Hurrah!"

High above the heads of the Vigilantes rung that cry.

"Kinkfoot Karl forever!"

Then the rush of horse-hoofs, and sharp spang of revolvers filled the air. Like bees the leaden pellets whistled about the ears of Lapstone's Vigilantes. A wild fright seized upon them, and they scattered and fled like frightened sheep. And Rung Lapstone was not behind the rest; his oaths, not loud but deep, filling the air.

"Routed! Baffled by the very man we was after!" growled the mad mine-owner. "Death and furies!"

The young man who stood beside his horse, whom Colonel Wixwalter had called Burril Graylock, was even more astonished at this attack than he had been at the first move.

After Lapstone and his friends had fled, a man drew rein for an instant beside Colonel Wixwalter and the young man he had called friend. The light from the house revealed his face, dark and handsome, shadowed by a heavy sombrero, a black mustache hiding the mouth completely.

"Kinkfoot Karl!" ejaculated the colonel.

"Rung Lapstone came for me," uttered the mounted man, "and I could not bear to disappoint him. Here's a carrion, colonel, that you'd best plant at once, as I haven't the time just now," and with the concluding words, the outlaw pointed to the stark and bleeding body of Bill Benson. "He is not the last; many more will follow. Good-night, colonel."

Away dashed the man, after the half-dozen men who had preceded him, in pursuit of the Vigilantes.

Colonel Wixwalter and his young friend stood masters of the field. Both men were puzzled. A voice from the house called the colonel's name.

"It is Evadne," said the colonel. "Come back, Burril, and assure the girl that you are

all right. I know by the sound of her voice that she is terribly alarmed."

Burril Graylock followed Colonel Wixwalter to the door, where the pretty girl, whose form was framed in the opening, was assured of his safety.

"What was all the trouble about?" questioned Evadne.

"I can scarcely say," uttered the young man; "every one engaged in it was unknown to me."

"It can't be possible that those ruffians were led by then oted mine-owner of Quartzville, Rung Lapstone," said the colonel.

"He was thus called by Kinkfoot Karl."

"True. I think I understand the situation now," uttered the colonel quickly.

"Well?"

"It was indeed Lapstone who led the villains. They came on purpose to seize you, Burril, for the purpose of hanging you on a trumped up charge. It is a part of this man's business to dispose of rivals in that way. I told you to look out for him. The scamp bears a bad name."

"I am aware of that; but I do not think you have the right of it yet, colonel. When the rascals seized me, the spokesman called me Kinkfoot Karl. I think he imagined I was the outlaw. One could easily be mistaken in the darkness, you know."

But Colonel Wixwalter was not ready to accept the young man's theory. He believed that no mistake had been made. Since Burril Graylock had staked a claim near Quartzville, and was soon to begin work, the colonel was satisfied that the master-spirit of the rival mining-town was determined to put him out of his way, and had taken this method of doing so. It would be easy enough satisfying the miners, by stating that Graylock was suspected of being in league with the notorious Mountain Scourge, Kinkfoot Karl.

Evadne evinced great solicitude, and tried to prevail on the young man to remain until morning, as did the colonel; but no, he must get to Quartzville that night, and no amount of urging could change his determination.

He departed on his journey, not to be interrupted this time as he had been before.

Early on the following morning the body of Bill Benson was consigned to earth by Colonel Wixwalter, assisted by a neighbor. The visit of the band of Vigilantes was talked about on the one street of Cape Horn, and much severe comment indulged in, but it all ended in talk, and soon the affair was forgotten.

Days passed.

Burril Graylock, the young speculator, came often to the cabin home of Colonel Wixwalter, ostensibly to consult the colonel on business affairs, since he had given the youth some advice, and invested not a little money in the new mine. In reality the two men were partners, the colonel's money being the principal lever at work in the new mine, which was not far from Quartzville.

It was the youth's ostensible errand to see the colonel on these frequent visits, but in truth, many of them would not have been made had there been no woman in the case.

Evadne Wixwalter had attracted young Graylock from the outset, and a six months' acquaintance was sufficient to reveal the condition of his heart. He was in love. But not yet was he ready to trust himself to speak.

The girl was always pleasant and friendly, but he was not prepared to even hope that she returned his love. In fact, such was not the case. The girl was heart-whole, and regarded Burril Graylock in the light of a very good friend, nothing more.

It was a moonlit evening, and the young speculator and Evadne were enjoying a stroll along the base of the mountain. The girl was a dear lover of nature, and never refused to walk with the colonel's friend when the chance for viewing the beautiful mountain scenery was good. Utterly self-reliant, Evadne never thought of danger, and she knew enough of Graylock to know that he was the soul of honor. She trusted him fully, and the hours passed in his company were pleasant ones.

"The prospects for a grand output of dust was never better," said Graylock, in confidence, as the twain gained the vicinity of the maiden's home. "I expect soon to be a rich man, Evadne, and—"

He hesitated, however, for Colonel Wixwalter just then appeared on the scene, and cut short the sentence.

"You're not going back to-night, Burril?"

"Yes. I left my horse down at the Open Hand stables; he's a fleet one and will take me to the mine in little over an hour."

"Well, have your own way, lad; but I do not approve of these night rides. Some day I'll find myself minus a partner, and the new mine will be without a boss."

The young speculator laughed at the fears of the colonel, as he turned his back on his friends and hurried away toward the town.

He was obliged to follow a path lined with bushes, near the base of the elevation on which stood the colonel's home. It was only a short distance to the Open Hand, and the bright silver moon illumined his path brilliantly.

"What a lovely night," mused the youth, as with bowed head and thoughtful mood he proceeded on his way to the tavern. He passed the open ground, and was just entering the bushes, when a slight sound attracted his attention.

He started back none too soon.

A bright blade gleamed in the moonlight, as a strong arm struck from the bushes at the speculator's life. In time to avoid that blow, but the next instant a man, wearing a mask, confronted Graylock, and thrust a pistol into his face.

CHAPTER XII.

STRANGE MEETINGS.

So sudden was the movement that Burril Graylock had no time to draw a weapon. The masked assassin had him on the hip surely. The bright moonlight showed the glistening barrel of the revolver, with hammer drawn, with the assassin's finger inside the guard.

"Die, you sneaking young vagabond!" hissed the man in mask.

But just then, a strange thing occurred. There was a sound like the hum of an arrow, a sharp glint of light athwart the vision of Graylock, and then the man in mask stood unarmed before his intended victim.

His revolver had been swept from his hand as if by magic, and by a well aimed bowie-knife! It was a movement so unexpected as to be startling. Before the young speculator could draw and shoot down the villain in mask, that individual uttered a wild cry of horror, and dashed madly away.

"Well, this beats me."

No wonder Burril Graylock uttered the words. A tree stood just outside the path, and in this stuck the huge bowie, that had been hurled from an unseen hand with such splendid accuracy.

With revolver drawn Graylock gazed about him in blank amazement, expecting to see the person who had saved his life in such a wonderful manner.

But no one appeared to claim the knife. The youth, after a minute, went to the tree, and with some difficulty drew the blade from the wood of the mountain oak.

It was an ordinary looking weapon, though, perhaps a trifle heavier than usual.

At once the mind of the youth reverted to the scene he had witnessed some time before, on that evening when one of the Vigilantes from Quartzville had fallen with his skull cleft by a bowie blade. Doubtless it was the same hand that had hurled both weapons.

Kinkfoot Karl!

Yes, for the second time the mountain terror had interfered to save his life. Really the young man felt that he had good cause to bless the outlaw, and he found himself wondering why this strange man should so interest himself in behalf of a stranger.

Another fact was patent also. The hand that sent the bowie with such accuracy, could easily have directed the blade to the heart or brain of the masked assassin. Why did he not do it? It was evident that the man in mask had escaped only through the leniency of Kinkfoot Karl, the Mountain Scourge, and this fact gave Graylock cause for more reflection and wonder.

As no one appeared, Graylock moved on toward Cape Horn, soon gaining the street.

"G'long, Bugs, yeou good-for-nothin' critter. Confusion seize us, ef me'n Bugs hain't about used up. These mountings be awful places fur hosses to travel over, I swow. Jerusha Ann! who's this?"

The speaker and his mustang came to a sudden halt, since Burril Graylock barred their pathway.

As queer a looking specimen as he had ever met, was this gaunt little Yankee, under the white plug hat, on the little mustang.

"Don't make so much noise, my friend," said the young speculator, smiling at the queer-looking object in the moonlight. "I won't hurt you. I merely wish to scrape an acquaintance."

"Waal, that's kind in yeou. I 'low I thought yeou might be Kinkfoot Karl, the big mounting robber, who, they do say, is a terror on wheels. Oh, Lord! I've been afeard I'd run afoul of the critter mor'n once sence I come West. I've had a heap o' trouble sence I left Bawston. Yeou see, I'll tell yeou how 'twas. My aunt Jerusha died and left me an orphing at the age o' thirty, an' I hedden't nowhar' ter lay my head, so, az Jerusha hed laid by a stock o' yarbs, an' was allus a doctorin' sick folks in ther neighborhood, I thought, seein' as I'd seen her fix things fur sick ones, I might take up the trade, go West an' grow up with the kentry, and git rich dealin' out yarbs to ther sick."

"Ah, you are a doctor, then?"

"I am, stranger. If you've got ther colic, toothache, headache, earache, broken limbs, spavins, the scratches, or—"

"Hold up," cried the young speculator, in alarm, "that is quite sufficient; I have none of the ailments you mention; should I be unfortunate enough to need your services I will call on you. Where do you hold forth, my worthy physician?"

"I hain't put out my shingle yet," said the Yankee, "but I'm a sojournin' at the Open Hand jest now. I made a bargain fur my board there this mornin'. He's ter take half his pay in professional work, and t'other half when he can git it. G'long, Bugs, can't stay here all day. Yeou goin' right along to ther tavern? Waal, we'll keep each other company. My name's Peter Homespun. Yankee Pete fur short, and yeou are—"

"Burril Graylock."

"Eh? Jiminy! I've heard o' yeou. Kind of a pardner in with ole Lapstone up ter Quartzville I reckon?"

"Heaven forbid!" ejaculated the youth, fervently.

"Eh? Waal, then I was wrong was I? Sorry. No I don't know's ole Lapstone's a trewly good man, but he keeps a fu'st-class hotel. I know, fur I stopped long of him myself. Had ter git up an' go without payin' my bill jest 'coz I wouldn't drink whisky, but Lapstone warn't to blame. I honors him as a gentleman. Ah, here we be at the hostelry, as the frog-eaters say, and I bid you good-night, Mr. Burril. Ef any time you she'd have the colic, earache, toothache, headache, itch, worms, spavin—Good Lord, he's gone!"

It was true; the young speculator had suddenly departed, leaving the Yankee alone, not caring to hear any more about the numerous ills his medicine was calculated to alleviate.

A little later a single horseman left Cape Horn and rode away toward Quartzville.

"There are many queer characters in these hills," muttered Burril Graylock. "Who would expect to meet a full-fledged Yankee in the mining districts; but if that fellow on the mustang under that ridiculous white hat, was not a genuine native of the New England hills, then I don't know myself. It's refreshing sometimes to encounter such specimens—Hello!"

The youth drew rein suddenly, while his revolver came to the front like a flash.

"Put up your barker, young man. I intend you no harm."

A man on horseback had suddenly crossed the speculator's path, and disputed his further passage.

"Who are you?" Graylock demanded, sharply.

"We have met before. Your life was assailed once this night, and you might have fallen, but for the assistance of a stranger; but if you continue on, you will never reach Quartzville alive. I am here to warn you."

Burril recognized the man now. It was Kinkfoot Karl, who seemed to spring up at will on occasions.

"Kinkfoot Karl!" exclaimed the youth, as he glanced into the face, shaded by the broad rim of his hat. "You have twice befriended me, and I am anxious to know why it is. I am a stranger to you."

"Quite a stranger until a few days since. I've noticed you on several occasions, and feel that you're too good a man to fall a victim to a scoundrel like the king of Quartzville," said the mountain outlaw in low, solemn tones.

"King of Quartzville?"

"Rung Lapstone of course," answered Kinkfoot Karl.

"Why does he seek my life?"

"You might ask him," and a low, bitter laugh rung out on the evening air. "Why does the cat pounce upon the unsuspecting mouse, or the tiger upon his prey? All men who come in Rung Lapstone's way are made his victims. He's treacherous, and a veritable devil of iniquity. Beware of him; he will kill you if he can, and he can and will if you continue on your present course to-night."

"But I must go on."

"Well, you can do as you choose."

The outlaw drew his animal aside from the mountain path, but the young speculator did not move on. He realized that Kinkfoot would not warn him without reason.

"Forgive me, sir," said the youth quickly, "I bow to your superior wisdom, and will turn back, if you will tell me wherein the danger lies?"

"It lies in Deadfall Canyon; men are secreted there to murder you. I can tell you nothing further, only that to go on is to ride to certain death."

"There is another road—"

"Yes, over a spur of the mountain; it is ten miles further, but it is a safe path."

"I will take it, as I am anxious to get through to-night," said Graylock. "I would ask you one question, Kinkfoot Karl, before you go."

"Well?"

The Mexican bandit halted his horse, as he had turned to depart.

"Why have you taken such an interest in a stranger? Twice you have saved my life—"

"Stop; I told you my interest was only to thwart the will of Rung Lapstone. He has done me a wrong, and is a villain of the deepest dye. People call me an outlaw, but this vile scoundrel lives unmolested by the law, while his hands are red with innocent blood, and mine, thank Heaven! have never shed blood save in retaliation, or to avenge wrong—good-night."

Quickly the outlaw wheeled his horse and

dashed away, leaving Graylock in a wondering mood in the shadow of a mountain boulder.

"Men lie in wait to murder me in Deadfall Canyon. What is it for? What have I done to merit this treatment? I cannot fathom the mystery. Surely my opening of a mine in the neighborhood of Quartzville cannot bring such enmity on my head. Kinkfoot Karl is a strange man, and so far as I have been able to learn, he has committed no robberies in a long time. Perhaps he is pursuing a scheme of vengeance that will not permit him to follow his old work at present. No, I cannot return to Cape Horn. I will take the path over the mountain spur. Some day, Rung Lapstone shall be brought to account for his villainy."

Wheeling his horse, the young speculator rode off to the eastward, and was soon climbing a steep ascent, which was rather difficult for a horse to climb.

Disappointment was to meet the villains who waited in Deadfall Canyon for the coming of the young speculator.

CHAPTER XIII.

A STRANGE INTERVIEW.

ONE afternoon, as Colonel Wixwalter sat in the little room he called his office, he was aroused from deep absorption in a map that lay before him by the loud clatter of horse's hoofs without.

A man had drawn rein in front of the house, and when the colonel looked out of the window, the rider had slipped to the ground and was approaching the colonel's door. The colonel was hardly surprised, since he received a goodly number of visitors from mine-owners, bosses, and men who were looking locations.

Evadne admitted the new-comer, and admitted him to the presence of her father.

Colonel Wixwalter pointed to a chair and said:

"Sit down, stranger."

The man sunk into the seat, tilted it back against the wall, and looked the colonel squarely in the face.

The colonel regarded his visitor with surprised curiosity.

A man past forty, with abundant black hair and beard, in which an occasional silver thread appeared, and deep-set, steel-gray eyes.

Surely the man was a stranger. He was well dressed, and undoubtedly a person of no little importance in the western country.

"Colonel Wixwalter, how do you do?"

The man held out his hand, a smile opening his lips.

The colonel accepted the hand, but still seemed puzzled.

"Colonel, don't you know me?"

"Frankly, no. I am sure I never met you until to-day."

"Strange that you should forget an old friend," muttered the man. "We were mighty good friends in the old times, colonel; and though you've grown a bit older, I can see the old lineaments plain enough. John, those old, good times won't come again soon, although I don't see why we cannot be on friendly terms."

"You have the advantage of me entirely, sir. I believe you have made a mistake. I certainly don't know you."

The smile still lingered on the face of the colonel's visitor. He seemed to enjoy the man's wonderment.

"Well, I'll enlighten you at once, Colonel Wixwalter. In this region I bear the name of Rung Lapstone. I am proprietor of Miner's Paradise in Quartzville, and have some acquaintances in Cape Horn. Fact is, colonel, I lived here some time, and only left a short time before you came."

"So I have heard, Mr. Lapstone. You called here some nights ago, with a Vigilantes Committee, if I am rightly informed," was the colonel's cool comment.

"Yes. We were looking for the notorious outlaw, Kinkfoot Karl. It was a sad mistake we made in lighting onto Mr. Graylock."

"Yet you clung to him after you knew the facts," and a scowl darkened the face of Colonel Wixwalter.

"I could explain if I had time, colonel," responded Lapstone, coolly, "but I have not. I came here this afternoon to renew old acquaintance. You are called colonel now, while my name has undergone an entire change since we roamed together in the old days. This new country has the effect, strange as it may seem, to alter names as well as time alters faces. Shake, old boy, and say you remember me now—Harris Maltby, of old Missouri."

Again the miner extended his hand, while the smile deepened on his rugged countenance. The name seemed to affect the colonel deeply.

While he was regarding the mine-owner in astonishment and wonder, the latter lifted the thick hair that hung low upon his brow, revealing a triangular scar on the temple.

"You know me now, John?"

"My soul! yes, it's Harris Maltby for a certainty; but I never expected to look again upon your face. I thought the Indians killed you at the time my wife and children perished."

"What? Didn't you get the letter I wrote you after I got back to Sacramento?"

"I never heard from you after you left Missouri, Harris."

"Well, that is strange. I heard that you were dead also, and that is why I never attempted to hunt you up. How wonderful some things happen in this world. You never heard an account of that terrible massacre, colonel."

"Never, only as from the lips of those who said they had found the dead bodies. You were certainly reported killed, Harris."

"I will tell you the story now, then, Colonel Wixwalter," said the mine-owner, looking away into vacancy, not seeming to care about watching the face of his old friend while he talked. "You remember, we trusted a good deal to old Tom Slater, who was accounted one of the best scouts and guides in the West at that time. He learned his business under Kit Carson, and I trusted him fully. Well, I won't dwell on this."

"We left Kansas City forty strong, and crossed a good bit of the plains without trouble. One day we camped in the edge of a strip of timber that bordered the banks of a creek, and I thought it a good idea to look up a little fresh meat for the emigrants, so I mounted my horse and set out for a range of hills not mor'n a mile distant. That's what I thought when I started, but I was a plump hour reaching them, so it must a-been near six miles."

"I ran afoul of game, an antelope, which I brought down at the first fire. I was off my horse fixing the carcass to carry back to camp when, as I looked across the prairie, I saw a sight that just raised the hair on my head straight as the bristles on a tooth-brush."

"A big crowd of red-skins a-riding like the wind toward our camp, and though they was mor'n a mile off, I could hear them whoop and yell where I was, squatted close to the ground, pretty well hid by a clump of bushes. You can believe that I didn't stop to fix up the carcass of the antelope, but led my horse into a low spot, behind some rocks and trees."

"I could do nothing to help the overlanders, and felt pretty bad when I thought of the pretty Mrs. Wixwalter and her three babies, I called them babies, 'coz the oldest wa'n't but four you know. It was horrible to think they must all be killed by the red devils, who seldom show mercy to their enemies, or to white folks."

"I didn't go back that night, but staid in the hills. Soon as 'twas light the next morning I mounted my horse and rode cautiously toward where I'd left the emigrants the night before. The Indians were gone, but such a sight as I saw. It makes my blood run cold when I think of it, John."

"The devilish red-skins had massacred the whole company, stole their horses, and burned the wagons. Poor Mrs. Wixwalter lay next the creek with a tomahawk in her brain. Not far off the three boys lay brained. Such sights! Forty bodies, some stripped naked, and all scalped! I will never forget it to my dying day."

"I've been in a good many scrimmages since, and seen some terrible sights, but nothing like that. I stayed two days there and buried the whole company. Old Tom Slater was brutally haggled up. I put poor Mrs. Wixwalter and her three babies in one grave, and covered 'em with blankets, before I heaped in the dirt."

"I marked the place, and mentally fixed it in my mind so that I could find it again if I wanted to. I got to California some weeks later, heard you was dead, and turned my steps to the mines, in which region I have been most of the time since."

"Struck it rich about a year ago, and may consider myself well beeled in the world. The moment I heard of Colonel Wixwalter, I wondered if 'twan't some relation to John, my old chum of the Missouri days. I saw your face t'other night, and knew 'twas you, and said to myself, I'd come over and see you as soon as I got time, and so here I am."

When the mine-owner finished his story, he heaved a sigh of evident relief, and ventured to glance again at Colonel Wixwalter. The colonel's face had grown somewhat pale during the recital. Even the lapse of twenty years had not obliterated all sorrow at the terrible death of his wife and family.

"Can you find that spot now, Harris Maltby?"

"I think perhaps I might."

"You will help me to find my wife's grave, Harris? I have thought on it for years. Had I known that the man to whom I intrusted my dear wife and boys, was still living, I would certainly have searched the world over to find him. I am glad you came, Harris Maltby; we shall be friends as in the past."

The colonel grasped the mine-owner's hand, and pressed it warmly, but no smile touched his face.

"Some day we will find those graves on the prairie, Harris. The sad duty of removing the remains to my San Francisco home is imperative."

"Certainly, of course. I will see you again, and talk over this matter," said Rung Lapstone, as he rose to go.

The colonel followed the schemer outside.

"Your second wife dead?" questioned Lapstone, as he stood by his horse and glanced back at a vision of rare loveliness that filled his sight in the person of Evadne.

"No," answered the colonel. "I have never married again," but without explaining how Evadne came to be a resident of his home.

But Rung Lapstone was not to be denied thus.

"The young lady is not your daughter then?"

"No, only by adoption. Her mother died a year ago; she was my brother's wife, and really Evadne is my niece, but I have formally adopted her, so she is, in the meaning of the law, as my own child."

"Exactly."

Rung Lapstone vaulted into the saddle.

"You will call again, Harris?"

"Certainly. You may expect me as a frequent visitor, now the ice is broken. Good-night."

Colonel Wixwalter watched the man as he rode away, a puzzled look pervading his face.

"It is unaccountable," he muttered. "I can hardly understand how it is that we have remained apart so long; such old friends too. I've heard hard stories about Rung Lapstone, but now I cannot believe them true, for Harris Maltby was one of the truest fellows I ever knew. He bears an assumed name, however, which does not look exactly right; yet it must be. I will speak to him about it when he comes again." Then the colonel walked thoughtfully back to the house.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SPECTER.

STRANGE as it may seem, Rung Lapstone had friends in Cape Horn. It seems that no matter how evil-minded a man may be, he will not lack for friends. To the cabin of one of these friends the mine-owner made his way, after leaving Colonel Wixwalter.

He was cordially received, and over a bottle of whisky the two discussed certain points that had been considered before to-night.

Luke Slicer was a thin, sun-dried specimen, with hollow cheeks, a stubby beard, and gaunt form; his face disfigured by a livid scar across the nose and cheek, which resulted in the loss of an eye.

Not a handsome man by any means, the reader will at once decide; yet he was a man who could keep a secret, one whom the king of Quartzville trusted to the fullest extent.

"It's a fact, Luke, I've been to see the colonel. He's the man I suspected, and he's got the prettiest daughter in the West."

"Eggsactly, pard."

"The colonel may not show off much here; but between me'n you, Luke, he is one of the richest men west o' the Rockies, and I mean to have the handling of some of his wealth. You understand?"

"Wal, I kin see 'bout as fur's the next one, Rung. You'll marry the gal, the cunnel'll kinder drop off like, and you'll git the hull pile. Wal, yas, that ain't a bad idee; no, it ain't, pard. I expect you need a leetle wealth jes' now. Eh, pard?"

"More than people imagine," uttered the scheming mine-owner, fondling the whisky-bottle, and fixing his gaze on the face of his companion. "I'm not poor, but the mines I'm working haven't proved the biggest bonanza in the world. The surest way out of a good many difficulties that I see looming up, is for me to marry the colonel's daughter, after which the old man can be fixed well enough."

"Eggsactly, pard."

"You may expect to see me a frequent visitor at the colonel's ranch hereafter. I'm going to cultivate a friendly feeling instead of making war. There's no reason why Quartzville and Cape Horn should be by the ears."

"None at all, boss."

"There are but two men I care a picayune about; one is Kinkfoot Karl, and the other that young upstart, who is breaking ground over at Quartzville for a new mine. I don't care for his rivalry there, but I've an idea he has got on the soft side of Evadne Wixwalter."

"Eggsactly, pard."

"Do you know anything about it, Luke?"

"Yas. I know the young cub's pretty well liked by the cunnel, and the gal allus seems pleased when he's 'round."

"That is sufficient," said Lapstone. "I want you to see to it, Luke Slicer, that Mr. Graylock steps off this mortal stage pretty suddenly. I don't want any delay in the matter either—delays are dangerous."

"Eggsactly, pard."

"As for Kinkfoot Karl, I will try and manage him. He's murdered some of my best friends, and would like to murder me, but I'll get the drop on him one of these days, and then, good-by, outlaw."

Both men laughed, but it was not a spontaneous bit of mirth. On the contrary, it was forced and unnatural. Neither of the twain felt easy since the mysterious slayer had begun his work.

Dan Bryne had been the first victim, more than a year before, and the same hand had been at work among the men who had fled from Sure Deal in order to escape an avenging Nemesis.

One thing the mine king had noticed, and that was that all the men who had fallen under the knife of the slayer were members of the party who assisted at the scourging of Little Gaudy that awful night, when those bags of gold disappeared from the shanty of Bryne and Lapstone.

Perhaps Luke Slicer had noticed the same thing, since he was one of the murderous gang who participated in the scourging of the little dandy.

One by one the members of that rough crowd were falling, and Kinkfoot Karl was supposed to be the avenger. Yet who was Kinkfoot Karl, that he should take it upon himself to hunt down the murderers of Little Gaudy? This question, though more than once asked, could not be answered. Through it all, however, Rung Lapstone associated Samson Hyte.

Samson Hyte and Kinkfoot Karl might be one and the same, yet this could hardly be. Hyte, however, was the prime mover in all the trouble; he was a member of the outlaw band, and had enlisted the Mountain Scourge to take up the gantlet; this much Lapstone believed, which the reader knows was not the fact.

It was night, and the moon was just peeping above the mountain peaks, when Rung Lapstone departed from the outskirts of Cape Horn. He went alone, but scarcely a mile had he passed when four horsemen joined him. They were friends from Quartzville, who had waited long for their master.

"A moonlight ride home," said Lapstone, with a cheery laugh. He could feel a bit cheerful now, since he was well filled with Luke Slicer's whisky, and that individual had solemnly promised to help him in the little scheme his evil brain was maturing.

"It won't be very light in Deadfall Canyon," uttered one of the men. "It makes a feller feel creepy all over to go through that darn tunnel in the daytime, say nothin' 'bout takin' the night fur it."

"Bah!" sneered Rung Lapstone, "if you're afraid, you can go back to Cape Horn and wait till morning."

"I'm not afeard."

In a little time they entered the canyon, whose gloomy shadows were penetrated in no part by the light of the silver moon. In single file they rode through the dismal place. It was but half a mile, and then the moon would show her face again.

On moved the little party, until, far in advance, a light spot announced the end of the dark canyon in sight.

"We'll be out o' this in a minnit, thank fortune," uttered a voice in the rear of Lapstone, who was in advance.

"Shut up back there," growled the mine-owner. "Don't git scared at your own shadows, men."

On in silence, save for the clinking of horses' hoofs, went the little party. They were rapidly nearing the open ground beyond the canyon, where the moonlight streamed over the mountain-side.

"Halt! Hands up!"

It was a startling summons, and sent a chill of horror to the hearts of every one in that little party.

Instinctively Rung Lapstone drew rein, for the voice came from the front, and was not to be misunderstood. His horse snorted and evinced signs of fear, and then, at one side of the canyon, a strange, weird, sickly light appeared, increasing in volume, until a large circle was illuminated.

"Great Harry! look thar!"

From behind Rung Lapstone came the cry.

As for the mine-owner, he was too terror-stricken to utter a word, as well he might be, for, in the center of the weird illumination appeared a face, a human face, the face of one whom, eighteen months before, he had strangled, after scourging the life nearly out of his body.

"Little Gaudy!"

In a husky moan of horror the name fell from the lips of Rung Lapstone. From the grave his murdered victim had risen to condemn him! There was no mistaking that face. There was the same pretty arrangement of the curling black hair, the same jaunty hat and jacket that had adorned the dandy on the very day of his death.

There were others who recognized the face, and for a full minute the Quartzvillians were held spell-bound with superstitious horror.

"Rung Lapstone, your days are numbered!—the boy you murdered calls, and you must come!"

In hollow accents came the words, although the lips of the specter seemed scarcely to move. Like a flash the face vanished, and the light, leaving a strong smell of brimstone behind.

With the fall of darkness, Rung Lapstone recovered himself partially, and snatching a revolver from his pocket he fired in the direction of the apparition.

A hollow, mocking laugh answered the report.

"You cannot escape your doom—the dead is calling, you must come, murderer!"

Again came the hollow words of warning, and the animal bestrode by the mine-owner,

reared and snorted wildly, as if smitten with the same terror that oppressed his master.

A distant, mocking laugh, and then all was still.

After considerable urging, the horses dashed forward, and soon carried their riders out into the moonlight.

"Great Harry! what was it?"

"A ghost!"

"A spook o' the mounting."

"A—"

"Shut up!" thundered the stern voice of Rung Lapstone.

"There's no such thing in this world of ours as ghosts. Somebody's playing a trick on us, that's all."

"A trick! Look a-hyar, Rung, you'n' I hev jined teams a good many times, and been through a heap o' hard places sence we left Sure Deal; but nothin' like this 'ere ever met us in ther face afore. I ain't noways superstitious, but, ef that ar' warn't the countenance o' Little Gaudy, then I, Jim Hinstraw, are a know-nothin' fool. Pard, fate's ag'in' us; we'd better travel, fur he are bound ter foller, and the only way we can git cl'ar o' ther specter is ter git outen ther minin' kentry altogether. 'Twas a sorry day when—"

"Stop, I won't listen to your nonsense," interrupted Rung Lapstone fiercely.

"Tain't nonsense, pard. We've been warn-ed."

But Rung Lapstone spurred madly forward, and refused to listen to the croakings of one who, up to this time, had been one of his staunchest followers, ready to carry out any evil deed for the sake of gain.

"It was a trick, a darned trick!"

Thus muttered the mine-owner, as he bent well forward, and with his eyes fixed on the mountain path, urged his horse madly forward. In spite of his assumed indifference, however, Rung Lapstone was terribly wrought upon by the specter of the canyon.

CHAPTER XV.

EVADNE AND KINKFOOT KARL.

RUNG LAPSTONE was thoroughly frightened at what had occurred in the canyon. Was it a trick? or had the spirit of the dead come back to convict him of murder?

The question proved a haunting one, and the mine-owner drank deeply to drown his superstitious dread. Yankee Pete had turned his back on Quartzville after his rough treatment, and was now a resident of the rival town of Cape Horn. This circumstance, however, did not displease Lapstone. He cared nothing for the Yankee, and was in fact glad to be well rid of the "yarb doctor"; yet, at the same time, there was a faint suspicion in the mind of Rung Lapstone that the Yankee was deeper than he had given him credit for, and that he was here in the mining-region for a purpose other than the one he professed.

"I've a good many enemies, it seems," muttered the mine-owner. "Kinkfoot Karl, Samson Hyte, young Graylock, and now the ghost of Little Gaudy! It beats the deuce how they do flock around me. By Satan, I'll rout the whole gang, and show 'em that Rung Lapstone's at the head of the heap yet. I've pulled the wool over Colonel Wixwalter's eyes, and his house will be open to me for a time. I will call there frequently, and win my old chum's consent to spark the girl, and then the game will soon be in my hands."

The villain was as good as his word.

He cultivated the acquaintance of the colonel, and in a little time it seemed that the old ties of friendship were renewed with all their old-time force and fervor.

Evadne smiled on him to please the colonel, and Lapstone felt that he was winning his way with more rapidity than he could have hoped.

He resolved upon a plan to win the deepest gratitude of Colonel Wixwalter, which he felt, if carried to a successful issue, would surely have the desired result.

Burril Graylock was busily engaged at his mine, and had little time for love-making, so that Lapstone had a comparatively free field. He brought bottles of rare old wine and treated the colonel, and over their cups the two men chatted of the past.

Evadne left them thus one day, and as was often her wont, walked up into the hills, where the grass and flowers grew, and where a bright stream of water dashed over glistening pebbles, and went with a hollow moan down into the throat of a dark gorge.

There, on a gray rock, she sat, a fairy queen among her inanimate subjects. This had been a trysting-spot, too, where young Graylock had met his "lady fair" on more than one occasion.

"Father seems utterly taken up with that dark-looking man from Quartzville. I wonder what there is about him so attractive. An old friend, he says. Well, I can't help thinking Rung Lapstone's not the good man father thinks him. I don't like his eyes, and—"

A little shriek finished the sentence.

A man had glided from some unseen source, and confronted the maiden on the rock.

And he was not a stranger to her, for his loose cloak, wide sombrero, and rather gaudy dress had come many times before under her eye.

"Kinkfoot Karl!"

After the half-frightened scream, Evadne found voice to utter the name.

A smile touched the face of the outlaw.

"You know me, Miss Wixwalter, and, knowing me, you certainly need feel no fear. People call Kinkfoot Karl an outlaw, but people do not know. No innocent blood is on my hands. I seek only to avenge the wrongs of the innocent, to punish murder and outlawry of a kind that the uncivilized state of this country permits. Kinkfoot Karl is a Nemesis, not a robber."

Wherein is the difference?

Thus seemed to question the eyes of the maiden, but in them lurked less of fear than before the Mountain Scourge had spoken.

"Miss Wixwalter—Evadne, do you believe me the bad man I have been painted?"

There was an eager longing in the eyes of the man that could not fail to meet the notice of the girl, yet she did not guess the real cause.

"No; it is seldom that people—bad people, I mean—are such heinous wretches as the world believes," she answered quickly, scarcely daring even yet to look the famous outlaw in the face.

"No. Am I then a heinous wretch in your eyes?"

The maiden dared not look at him then, for she could feel his keen black orbs piercing her through and through.

"I—I have never thought about it," she stammered. "You oughtn't to ask such questions, Mr. Kinkfoot. You see I am only a girl, and not supposed to know."

"Exactly. Will you believe me, Evadne Wixwalter, when here with my hand on my heart, in the presence of the rarest flower of the mountains, I aver that my hands are clean—no innocent blood stains them, nor ill-gotten gold blisters their palms?"

Deep and earnest were the words uttered by the strange mountain outlaw.

What could she say?

His words seemed to be earnest and full of truth, and yet she had been led to look upon this man as a demon of wickedness. Even now she had in mind a terrible robbery and murder that had occurred but the year before, not many miles distant, in which the name of Kinkfoot Karl figured as the principal in the crime.

"You must excuse me, sir," and the girl made a move to escape.

"No."

A small hand shot from under the man's cloak and pushed her back, and she knew then that she was at the mercy of the terrible man before her, whose voice and mien were as gentle as a woman's.

"Not yet," he said. "I cannot permit you to go, for I came here on purpose to talk with you; not to harm a hair of your pretty head, but to warn you against trusting a certain man."

He paused, as if expecting a reply. None came, and he proceeded:

"Of course I could refer to no one else but Rung Lapstone, the miner king of Quartzville."

Evadne looked up then, her gray eyes fixed questioningly on his dark face, which was shaded deeply by his hat.

"Rung Lapstone a villain?"

"You have hit it exactly, my girl; a thrice accursed villain, and—but it cannot be that Colonel Wixwalter will permit the scoundrel to deceive him! You are the only one in danger."

"I?"—in astonishment.

"Ay! I will not retract my words, pretty maid; it is you the ill-omened villain seeks, and to win you he is using plenty of soft solder on the father. I know," and a frown darkened the face of Kinkfoot, "for I can read the man's nature. I warn you to beware of him—Rung Lapstone, the vilest cur that pollutes the earth with his presence!"

"You astound me, sir."

"No doubt. Rung Lapstone has a silver tongue, and it has carried him through many bad places. I feel that he is winning his way with Colonel Wixwalter now, and that you will soon hear that he has won your father's consent to pay his addresses to you."

"Preposterous!" ejaculated Evadne, her fear of the man before her quite vanished now, under the spell of his gentle voice and manner.

"No, it is not preposterous, as you will presently discover."

"But the man is as old as my father."

"All the more reason why old ties will soften the colonel's heart toward the schemer. I am well posted regarding the movements of Rung Lapstone. He and I will meet and have it out to the death some time, but not now; and yet, sooner than see him win at the game he is now playing, I will send a knife to his heart. Again I raise my voice, bidding you beware of that man."

"Why should the outlaw care?" thought the maiden.

"There was no need of the warning, Kinkfoot Karl," Evadne said at length. "I care nothing for this rich miner. I don't like him, and am quite sure he'll make no such fool of himself as you predict."

The girl slipped from the rock then, as no hand was put forth to detain her.

Kinkfoot Karl watched her as she moved away, and all of a sudden gained her side at a bound.

"Remember, Evadne, whatever happens, I am your friend. Rung Lapstone shall not succeed. It would be worse than a crime to have him do so."

The next moment the strange man was gone. Evadne cared not to remain longer amid the hills, and she drew her hat upon her waves of brown hair, and walked rapidly homeward.

Rung Lapstone was just departing as the maiden came up. With a politeness new to him, the mine-owner lifted his hat and smiled on the maiden, in a manner meant to be agreeable; but the girl felt chilled by his smile, and avoiding him, passed into the house.

"Mr. Lapstone is not such a bad fellow after all, Evadne," said Colonel Wixwalter a short time later. "I have not yet told you about his past life, and that he and I were friends twenty and more years ago, before you saw the light of this world, child."

"No, I did not know he was such an old friend. I fear you are trusting him to your hurt, father."

"No danger of that; Harris is a capital fellow."

"Harris?"

It was out now, and Colonel Wixwalter was obliged to enter into an explanation. The mine-owner had convinced the colonel, as the two discussed a bottle of rare wine, that the change of name really amounted to but little; scarcely any man in the mines bore the name he brought with him away from the old home, and it was a mere fancy of his that caused him to make the change. At the same time Lapstone requested, as a favor, that the colonel would not call him by his right name here, as it would naturally place him in an awkward position, etc. Colonel Wixwalter accepted the explanation, a little doubtingly perhaps, yet he accepted it, and now entered into an explanation to Evadne, telling her of the past, and of the relations Lapstone then sustained to him. But if the old colonel was blinded, his daughter was not in the least.

CHAPTER XVI.

A BOUT WITH TOUGHS.

"Where now, father?"

"I am going over to Quartzville this afternoon. I have an appointment," said Colonel Wixwalter, as he led his horse to the front of the house just after noon one pleasant day, only a short time after Evadne's meeting with Kinkfoot Karl.

"Is your appointment with that odious Rung Lapstone?"

"No, it is with Mr. Graylock; but I do not care to have you speak thus harshly of my old friend. I am just beginning to find the true heart beneath his rugged exterior. Harris Maltby was always a little queer, but I have ever found him a staunch friend."

"Forgive me, father, but I don't like Rung Lapstone, and I fear you will one day discover to your cost, that he is not your friend."

To this the colonel made no answer, and Evadne went back to an inner room, while the gallant colonel rode away toward Quartzville.

He met with no adventure on the way, and after putting out his horse in the stable adjacent to Miner's Paradise, the colonel went in to see the proprietor. Several toughs were in the bar-room, but the mine-owner was out.

"Want ter see the boss, eh?" growled Jim Hinstraw, who, with his superabundance of hair, looked like a huge lion.

"Yes, I come to see Mr. Lapstone—"

"Mebbe he wa'n't expectin' yer?"

"He must have been, since he sent for me to come over. Can you tell me where I will find him?" returned the urbane colonel good-humoredly.

"Wal, I swa'r I guess not. Like enough he's down to er mine; but, dod blast it, w'at does it matter, pard? Jest step up an h'ist in some pizen with yours truly," and with the words, the man laid a heavy hand on the colonel's arm, and began pulling him toward the bar.

As may be supposed, this unceremonious treatment did not "go down" with the gallant colonel.

"Hands off, you hairy scamp; I want none of your whisky," and Colonel Wixwalter drew back sharply.

"Eh? Go in' to be obstreperous? Gad you, pard, I'll not take no fur an answer. Come up an' drink, or fight Jim Hinstraw, that's the exact racket, old chap."

Again the stout tough advanced, this time with clinched hands, and threatening manner. Colonel Wixwalter was easily aroused, and not

being used to this sort of treatment, his temper took fire at once.

"Take that, you hairy scamp!"

With the quickness of lightning the colonel struck from the shoulder, planting a terrific blow between the eyes of the burly Quartzvillian. With such force was the blow delivered, the ruffian, Hinstraw, went to the floor as quickly as though felled by a pile-driver.

And this movement on the part of the colonel was the signal for a general uproar.

There were six men in the room aside from the colonel and bartender, and the five companions of Hinstraw at once flung themselves upon the foolhardy colonel.

It was a desperate and furious struggle, for Colonel Wixwalter, though past the prime of life, was a man of immense muscular power. This way and that he hurled his assailants, but was prevented from drawing a weapon, and as each one of his opponents was noted for his strength and staying qualities, the colonel was finally overpowered and crushed to the floor.

He was now completely at the mercy of the six men. The barkeeper did not offer to interfere, and so the colonel found himself in an unenviable predicament.

"Let me at 'im!" howled a voice trembling with mad passion. "I'll fix 'im so't he won't strike no honest miners ag'in."

Room was made, and Jim Hinstraw bent over the colonel, with a huge bowie clutched in his hand. The fire of a devilish purpose glowed in the man's eyes. Five men held every limb as in a vise, and this heartless villain was to have his way. It was a terrible situation.

Baring the colonel's neck with one hand, Hinstraw raised the bowie in the other, and made ready for the fatal stroke.

"You fiend! hold up!" gasped the colonel.

"Durn yer skin, no man strikes Jim Hinstraw an' lives. Here ye go!" and he waved his knife an instant, and then—*Crack!*

The sharp report of a pistol filled the room, and the flourished knife no longer gleamed above the bared throat of Colonel Wixwalter.

A well-aimed pistol-bullet had swept it from the hand of the mad miner, and an instant later a man rushed upon the scene with a revolver clinched in each hand.

"Out of this, you scoundrels, or I'll fill every mother's son of ye with lead pills! Up and go! quickly now!"

And then there was a scattering.

Soon the last ruffian slunk from the room, by which time Colonel Wixwalter was on his feet, his hand clasped in that of Rung Lapstone.

"The infernal scoundrels," cried Rung indignantly, "I'll see the last dog of 'em swing for this. Judge Lynch shall deal with them. My soul! you'd have been murdered in another minute, John."

"I believe you," articulated the colonel, as he brushed the dirt from his clothing. "Have you many such scamps in Quartzville?"

"Well, we have our share, colonel, our share, and perhaps a little more. They'll be cleared out though, when the mine boys hear of this—a friend of mine being so treated. I was out a little longer than I meant to be. Sorry it happened, John. I mean to keep a quiet place, but these scamps will come in sometimes."

"Certainly, certainly," uttered Colonel Wixwalter. "I won't get caught that way again if I know myself."

Then he expressed his gratitude in a few feeling words, after which the two adjourned to the mine-owner's private room, where they talked over their affairs, and took in a bottle of wine at the same time.

"Evadne, how do you like Mr. Lapstone?"

This question fell from Colonel Wixwalter's lips two days after his visit to Quartzville. The two were at dinner, and the question came rather unexpectedly, but the maiden was equal to the occasion.

"I do not like him at all. I thought I had told you so, father, more than once."

"Possibly you have," answered the colonel, as he sipped his coffee, "but I'd forgotten it certainly. I am grieved that you should feel so, Evadne. Mr. Lapstone seems to be a very nice man, and—and, ahem, he admires you very much."

"Indeed," returned the maiden; "I am not thankful for his admiration. Such men are not fit associates for ladies."

The colonel looked decidedly astonished at this severe remark from his daughter, and perhaps he was a trifle shocked as well; but he had agreed to broach a certain subject to please his old friend, and he was determined to do so now, let the consequences be what they might.

"You wrong Mr. Lapstone, Evadne," said the colonel, after a moment's reflection in order to fix upon a mode of procedure. "He seems a little rough to be sure, but his long contact with mining people has made him so. I assure you, he was quite a polished young man, and an ornament to society when I knew him in Missouri—"

"Which was many, many years ago, dear papa?"

"Not so very long ago. About twenty years, or perhaps a little more."

"He was older then than I am now—he must be older than you, father; he looks it anyhow, and—"

"Please listen to me, Evadne," interrupted the colonel with a decided frown. "Mr. Lapstone has a young heart if he is a little past the heyday of youth."

Then Colonel Wixwalter told about his visit to Quartzville, of the attempt made upon his life, and of Rung Lapstone's interference in time to save him from a terrible death.

"He is my bosom friend, Evadne, and if you could like him a little you know, it would be so nice to have him in the family; and he is very wealthy."

"Well?"

"You know what I would say?" said Colonel Wixwalter, fidgeting in his chair, as the clear, honest gray eyes of his daughter were fixed on his face.

"How should I know?" innocently.

"He wants to—that is, Mr. Lapstone wants a wife."

"Indeed? Well, I hope he will find one."

"But it is for you to decide, Evadne; he wants you," burst out the colonel, looking guilty as he uttered the words.

"Well, father, it has taken you a long time to tell it. I don't wonder you felt guilty. The idea of a man older than my father wanting me to marry him. Colonel Wixwalter, I don't see how you could have the brass to bear such a message to me."

It was evident that Evadne was losing some of the respect due her foster-parent, in her hot indignation at what, to her, seemed little less than an outrage.

"Well, well, well!" ejaculated the colonel, and for some time he could go no further.

"Of course, if you don't like Mr. Lapstone, and can't learn to like him, you need not marry him. There shall be no compulsion in the matter, not the least I assure you, Evadne. So far as choosing a husband is concerned, you are your own mistress of course, and I've nothing further to say. Harris'll be badly disappointed, but as you say, it will be better for him to find a person nearer his age for a wife; certainly, certainly."

The colonel shoved back from the table and rose to his feet with a relieved expression of countenance.

Truth to say he had eased his mind of a disagreeable duty, and now that it was over, he felt better. Evadne's refusal to marry his friend rather pleased him than otherwise, and he was not disappointed at the result, but he had, out of regard for the wishes of Lapstone, spoken to Evadne.

The colonel went outside, into the cool mountain air, and then he saw that approaching vehicle that brought a smile to his face.

"G'long, Bugs. Tarnation take this kentry! Peter Homespun, it's a sorry day yeou left old Bawston ter migrate to this outlandish jumpin'-off bit of creation—Hullo!"

The Yankee doctor drew rein and lifted his hat to Colonel Wixwalter, who stood regarding his approach with a smile.

CHAPTER XVII.

YANKEE PETE TELLS A STRANGE STORY.

"GOOD-MORNING, doctor," uttered the smiling colonel. He had seen the Yankee in the village, and had heard some of the loungers at the Open Hand speak of the queer fellow as a doctor, but until to-day he had never entered into conversation with him.

"Apple-sass and chowder, mister, how'd ye find yeoursel' this day? Right well lookin', and smilin'—a basket o' chips. Yeou hain't got a guilty soul like most of the residents in this outlandish country. I'm a doctor, and come all the way from Bawsting ter set up my office in the West. Jingo! I hain't had no luck a-tall; but jest as soon's I can raise the rhino I'm a-goin' to git out this 'ere tarnation kentry."

"Not much call for physicians," answered the amused colonel. "This is a very healthy country."

"Mostly, mostly," uttered the Yankee. "I hadn't called on yeou yet. Hain't got the ear-ache, toothache, colic, backache, headache, glanders, scratches, spavins, or nothin' I reckon, 'coz ef yeou have, I've got the yarbs right in here that'll knock 'em eendways every gol-blessed time; I have, cunnel, and no mistake. Aunt Jerusha, rest her soul, larnt me all about yarbs."

Yankee Pete slapped his saddle-bags to emphasize his assertions, and slipping quickly to the ground, lifted them across his arm, and advanced toward the house.

"I am not ill, sir!" said the colonel, "and have no use for any of your patent 'yarbs.' Where you going?"

"Right into the house, cunnel; I've got a masheen in here I want you to look at."

Feeling in the mood for a little good-natured amusement just then, Colonel Wixwalter permitted the Yankee to enter, and conducted him to his private room.

"Bugs'll stand," said Yankee Pete, as the colonel glanced back at the little mustang. "He's almost human, that 'ere Bugs is. I could talk all day, tellin' about the interestin' things

he's did, but you hain't the time to listen, nor I the time to tell it."

The Yankee deposited his well-filled saddle-bags on the floor, and sat himself down without ceremony.

Unstrapping one he drew out a small tin box, and removed the cover, revealing a light-colored salve.

"Thar, Cunnel Wixwalter, there's the primest 'intment yeou ever set eyes on. Aunt Jerusha, she made it fur the express purpos' o' curin' the hull neighborhood of the itch—best itch-'intment yeou ever see'd in all yeour born days, cunnel. It beats—"

"Never mind that," interrupted the colonel. "I told you I didn't care for any of your medicine."

"Gol-durn my picter, so yeou did. Mebbe yeou'd like some sassyfrass-pills? Jest the thing fur obstructed liver, chills an' fever, blue devils, aches, pains, and the like; most a cure-all, I tell ye, cunnel."

But the colonel refused to talk medicine, and the Yankee closed his saddle-bags, after returning the "intment," and then crossed his legs and looked at the floor, while he stroked his pointed yellow beard.

"Cunnel, I allow yeou go up to Quartzville sometimes?"

Without looking up, the Yankee put the question, and Wixwalter admitted that he had visited that town.

"To see Rung Lapstone?"

"Rung Lapstone is my friend."

"Don't you believe it nuther," cried out Yankee Pete with a suddenness and earnestness that quite surprised the good-natured Colonel Wixwalter.

"Queer yeou think it, cunnel, that Yankee Pete should find out something 'bout yeou and that are Rung Lapstone, but he did. Yeou see, I go out lookin' yarbs occasionally, and that's haow I run onto the Injun as told me a heap 'bout some of the innocent fellers in Quartzville; yes, sir, a heap."

"When I heard you was gittin' so friendly like with Lapstone, I thought 'twouldn't do no harm to tell yeou what I'd heard, and that's jest why I'm here to-day, Cunnel Wixwalter."

"Well?" uttered the colonel, who was really interested in spite of himself. He could not believe the queer little Yankee knew anything that would interest him, yet it would do no harm to listen, and his story might be an amusing one, and serve to pass an idle hour.

"Ef I hadn't heard yeou was a good man, cunnel, and had a pretty, innocent darter, I wouldn't stick my nose into this business, but since I learned this, I made up my mind I'd tell you what the Injin told me."

"Proceed."

"Once upon a time, as the story books run, yeou went from ole Missouri to Californy to seek yeour fortin', leavin' ter hum the mistress and three small children."

"Right," uttered Colonel Wixwalter, in astonishment, since but two persons besides himself he supposed in possession of his past history, and these Evadne and the man who chose to call himself Rung Lapstone.

"You writ hum and sent fur yer wife and babies to come on, and meet you in the gold country, requestin', as Harris Maltby was comin' anyhow, fur him to take charge of the family on the road."

"Good gracious! Yankee, how did you learn so much? You must have been talking with Rung Lapstone."

"Thar's where yeou're mistook, mister. 'Twas an Injun thet gi'n me the information. Shell I go on?"

"Yes, yes, by all means," cried the colonel, leaning forward and transfixing Yankee Pete with an intensity of gaze that rendered the yellow-haired "yarb doctor" a bit nervous. He plucked more fiercely at his pointed yellow beard, and without once looking at the colonel, he proceeded with his story; and at times the usual nasal twang was scarcely noticeable, as he warmed with his subject.

"Harris Maltby undertook the charge, and with an overland party of nigh about fifty folks, all men 'ceptin' your wife, they set out fur Californy. Did they ever git thar, cunnel?"

"No, never."

"No, 'coz they war killed by the Injuns. Yeou know this is so, 'coz Harris Maltby told you himself."

"Yes, and I have heard it from others."

"Wal, it's putty nigh true I reckon," proceeded the Yankee, "only Maltby war knowin' to the racket beforehand. 'Twas him that set the trap. He war a renegade. You've heard of them critters, cunnel?"

The Yankee again paused, but Colonel Wixwalter said not a word, and so he proceeded:

"Everybody was killed save the woman, your wife, cunnel, and mebbe the children. She was carried away inter captivity, and the children fell to some of the red-skins. Whether they war killed the Injun didn't know, but the woman was taken to a cave and held there a prisoner with Injuns to guard her."

"Jest a week after, who should come to see her but Harris Maltby, who acted drefful sorry, but swore he couldn't keep the savages off'n the

emigrants. He said as how he'd heerd her husband was dead, and sence she was a widder, the was free to marry ag'in."

Again the Yankee paused, but not a word fell from the lips of Colonel Wixwalter. His face was white with passionate eagerness as he listened, and his hands gripped the sides of his chair until the blood threatened to burst from the purple skin.

"Of course she treated all his vile advances with scorn," proceeded Yankee Pete, "and then Harris Maltby flew mad and cursed her, and swore he'd make her wish she'd never been born. Oh, he was an ugly one. He abused your wife shamefully, cunnel, but she defied him to the last."

"Finally he tried to reach her heart through her children. They weren't dead, but the Injuns had 'em, and they sh'ud die by torture ef she didn't yield. Ah! the poor woman was badly shook up then. She wanted her little children, her darling boys; but the merciless scoundrel would not permit her to see 'em, and she wept tears of blood when he came one day and said they was all dead, and the'r scalps danglin' in Injun wigwams."

"How she lived after that I don't know, but she did. At last Maltby left and didn't trouble her no more. Years went by, and still the woman lived in the lonely cave. The Injuns war kind to her, but wouldn't let her go far away to seek the whites. She never fully believed the story Maltby had told about her children. She was anxious to meet him again, and if possible, git from him the truth. Wal, one day she made an attempt to escape; this was 'bout a year ago, and Injun Joe—he war her guard—shot and killed her, and now her body lies in an unknown grave on the mountain-side. Cunnel Wixwalter, I have told yeou this as Injun Joe told it ter me, and he swore 'twas God's truth. Mebbe 'twill open yeour eyes a little, and pervent your trustin' that serpent, who, under the name of Rung Lapstone, is doin' evil work in this region, in the very country where he murdered your first wife. Cunnel, good-afternoon."

Quickly the Yankee sprung to his feet, and lifting his saddle-bags, turned to depart.

For some moments Colonel Wixwalter sat rooted to his chair, unable to move or speak. When at length he did fully recover and gain his feet, he saw through the window Yankee Pete mounting Bugs and about to ride away.

He had no power then to even call to him, and soon the Yankee "yarb doctor" was gone. A white face was pressed to the pane, and the black eyes that stared out into the glinting sunshine were fixed and glassy with the inward horror that oppressed the soul of Colonel Wixwalter.

No living soul save himself and Harris Maltby could know of this story of the past, save the red demons who engaged in that fearful massacre of the long ago, and surely the story of Yankee Pete must be true—an Indian had revealed one of the mysteries of the past.

"I must see Yankee Pete again, and from him learn where to find this Indian, and the lonely grave of my poor Marion."

With the muttered words Colonel Wixwalter reeled back from the window with a harsh, grating cry.

A sight filled his vision that caused his heart to harden like stone.

It was Rung Lapstone who had come into view, and was riding leisurely toward the house.

"He comes, the traitor!" hissed the soul-stirred man in that little room.

A moment later, forcing back his own overcharged feelings, Colonel Wixwalter went forward to meet the miner king of Quartzville.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MASK IS OFF.

FACE to face the two men stood in Colonel Wixwalter's office.

A smile wreathed the lips of Rung Lapstone, and he seemed in unusual good humor, since he felt that he was winning his way more rapidly than he had reason to expect. He sunk into a chair, but the colonel remained standing.

"Sit down, colonel, and let's hear all about it. Of course you have spoken to Evadne regarding the subject we were discussing a few days ago."

"I have," answered Colonel Wixwalter, facing the miner king with white face and close-set teeth.

"What did the sweet girl say?"

"That she did not like and would not marry you."

"Ah, well, you can soon talk her out of that notion," chuckled the confident villain. "My age was against me, of course, but our long friendship will offset that. I am a well-preserved bachelor, I take it, and the girl can learn to like me, of course. That will come after marriage."

"Evadne will never marry you. Harris Maltby!" uttered the colonel, sternly. "She dislikes, and I hate you, traitor!"

"What?"

Rung Lapstone came to his feet, an astonished, half-angry look flooding his face, while his

broad chest rose and fell like an immense bellows.

"Sit down!" commanded Colonel Wixwaller, sternly. "There is no occasion for exhibition of temper on your part. I wish to propound a few questions."

Mechanically the mine-owner went back to his seat, although his face was still clouded with a perplexed frown.

"Harris Maltby, where is my wife?"

"Eh?" and the mine-owner looked up with a puzzled expression. "Great snakes! old boy, I hope you ain't going mad?"

"Harris Maltby, where is my wife?" again demanded the colonel, sternly, an inflexible look steeling his black eyes, as they glanced in the face of the miner king.

"What in Satan are you driving at, pard?" articulated Lapstone. "Your wife passed from earth twenty years ago."

"It's a lie! You held her a prisoner for years, and only a year ago she died. I have discovered your damnable treachery and villainy, Harris Maltby. You may thank your stars that I spare your life to-day; I am not yet mad enough to slay you, but the time may soon come—and when it does, look well to yourself, scoundrel, for I will have no mercy."

The colonel paused.

He had not spoken in a loud voice, but it came forth sharp and penetrating, and his pale face and flaming eyes betokened the fierce feelings that were roused within.

Rung Lapstone came to his feet again.

"Who told you this fine story, Colonel Wixwaller?"

"Perhaps it was Indian Joe."

"Hades! he has betrayed me!"

The mine-owner lost all command of himself then. The name of Indian Joe had power to rouse all the worst passions of his nature. He believed the red-skin had betrayed him, and Lapstone at once threw off the mask.

"I won't deny anything!" finally grated the mine-owner. "I see that an Indian cannot be trusted. Yes, Colonel Wixwaller, your wife *did* die only a year ago, and her grave is not far from Quartzville. I have played a sharp game and failed—so let it be; but I am not through yet. I shall some day win and wear the priceless jewel you hold so sacred in the person of Evadne. She shall yet be mine, Colonel John Wixwaller; and when the time comes, you will be glad enough to bow your head low in the dust, and crave my pardon for the—"

"Hold, you scoundrel!"

With a mad oath the colonel flung himself upon the man who but an hour ago he believed his friend.

Both went to the floor in a fierce struggle for the mastery. Both were strong men, and were very evenly matched. It was a struggle of giants, and the house fairly trembled with the shock.

Over and over rolled the combatants. Chairs were prostrated; the little table fell and was soon crushed in ruin, and still the men struggled on.

Finally, by a chance movement, Rung Lapstone extricated himself from the fierce clutch the colonel had fixed upon him, and shaking himself as a dog might after a bath, he slipped a hand about his hip, until it rested on the hilt of a knife.

"Colonel Wixwaller, you begun the racket, and now you'll go to join your wife! I'll win and wear the jewel yet! Evadne shall marry her father's slayer!"

The next instant Lapstone raised his knife above the breast of the struggling colonel.

But two days before, the miner king had rescued Colonel Wixwaller from the knife of Jim Hinstraw, now he was about to slay the man he then called friend.

Rung Lapstone's back was toward the door, which had suddenly opened, unknown to either of the combatants.

The vengeful knife did not descend into the bosom of Colonel Wixwaller.

A pair of strong hands grasped the intended murderer, and the next instant he was hurled with terrific violence across the room. At the same instant a woman's terrible scream filled the room.

A most sudden change had come over the scene.

When Colonel Wixwaller staggered to his feet, he saw a roughly dressed man, confronting his late assailant, with a revolver leveled at his breast. Just inside the door stood Evadne, with uplifted hands and startled countenance.

"Hands up, Rung Lapstone! You hain't forgot yer durn ugliness sence ye left Sure Deal I see. No, ef ye try that, down ye go."

Thus spoke the man, a stranger to Colonel Wixwaller, who had rushed into the room in time to save his life. If the colonel did not know the newcomer, Rung Lapstone was not a stranger to the fresh-faced man, in rude garments, who now covered his heart with a revolver.

"Samson Hyte!"

Thus did the baffled miner give vent to his feelings.

"Yer mem'ry's good, Rung Lapstone," returned the jolly miner. "Up to yer old tricks

I see. Jest you pull out now, or I may forget myself an' kill the scamp that murdered Little Gaudy. Git out to once!" and Samson Hyte shook his head threateningly.

"Scoundrel—"

"Go! Don't you dare threaten me!"

There was no mistaking the severe words of the young miner, and as Lapstone knew the giant too well to resist his orders, he turned and, without looking at Evadne, slunk from the room.

A minute later, the miner king of Quartzville rode from the vicinity at a mad pace.

Before he passed from sight, he turned in his saddle and shook his fist toward the house of Colonel Wixwaller, indicating by this movement that he would yet wreak terrible revenge on the inmates.

Colonel Wixwaller grasped the stout young miner by the hand and shook it warmly. He did not need to ask his name, since Rung Lapstone had spoken it in a tone loud enough for all to hear.

"I've jest kim over from Graylock's mine," said Samson Hyte.

"Ah! perhaps you are in the employ of Mr. Graylock?"

"I am. Bein' an old miner, the youngster gi'n me a job. I kim hyar with a message from the young feller fur Cunnel Wixwaller, which is how I happened on the scene of action jest as I did. Ah, that durn Lapstone's a beastly bad man! I know'd him a good while ago, when he run things with a high hand at Sure Deal, in Californy. He robbed his pardner thar, and licked a poor leetle cuss ter death 'coz he wouldn't own up to the stealin'."

"You astonish me!" ejaculated the colonel. "I never suspected how vile a man I had to deal with until to-day. Why did he leave Sure Deal?"

"'Coz he hed ter. Somebody got onter his track—a man who swore ter wipe out ther last man that hed a hand in murderin' Little Gaudy—and the durn cuss skinned out an' tuck ter ther Iderbo hills, whar he concluded he'd be safe—but he ain't. The avenger's onter his track even here, and the king of Quartzville's got more'n his hands full."

"Who is this avenger of whom you speak, sir?" questioned Evadne, respectfully, having now recovered from the fright caused by the late exciting scene.

"Wal, miss, I ain't jest perpared ter state," answered Samson, casting an admiring look upon the pretty Evadne. "It may be, though, thet Kinkfoot Karl might tell."

"Ah! I knew it," murmured Evadne.

"Kinkfoot Karl!" uttered Colonel Wixwaller. "I have met the man, and he did me a good turn once. Many bad reports have gone out about him, but I feel that they are not all true."

"I am sure he is not a bad man," asserted Evadne. "He knew Rung Lapstone better than either of us."

And then for the first time the maiden told of the meeting she had with the outlaw in the hills, some time before, and of the warning he had uttered regarding the mine-owner of Quartzville.

"Wal," said Samson Hyte, when Colonel Wixwaller had explained how he learned of the deep and damning villainy of Lapstone, which had resulted in a deadly encounter, "I allow you hain't seen and heerd the last of the or'nary cuss, cunnel. He's a headstrong skunk, and'll do somethin' despr'it putty soon. Better look out fur 'im, cunnel; better keep yer eye peeled all ther time."

"I shall be on my guard in the future," answered the colonel.

Samson Hyte disposed of the business that brought him to the colonel's, and then, with the best wishes of Colonel Wixwaller ringing in his ears, departed to return to Graylock's mine near Quartzville.

"Father, the mask is off at last."

"Off at last, Evadne, thank Heaven!" answered the old colonel, fervently.

"And now you will have nothing further to do with the villainous mine-owner of Quartzville?"

"No, only to avenge the murder of my wife and children," answered the colonel, hoarsely; and the sudden look of wrath in his eyes boded no good to Rung Lapstone.

CHAPTER XIX.

A STARTLING INTERRUPTION.

"MINERS of Quartzville, the time has come for action."

It was evening, and in front of Miner's Paradise were gathered at least fifty men; rough pets of the mountain mines, who knew no law save the will of their employer, who stood now in front of the tavern and addressed his willing tools in a loud voice.

A bonfire had been kindled, and this lit up the scene with a brilliance that was more glaring than the noonday sun.

"The outlaws of Cape Horn have dared bid us defiance. Only to-day I was over there visiting an old friend, when a dozen of the villains assaulted me, and I narrowly escaped with my life."

A yell of angry indignation followed the words of the mine-owner.

Near the outskirts of the crowd stood a small figure enveloped in a cloak, which completely hid his form. Over his brows was drawn a slouched hat, so that only a pair of keen eyes flashed forth—eyes that watched the speaker on the veranda with keen intensity, that, had the miner king discovered them, would have given him a nervous shock.

"Kinkfoot Karl, the notorious road-agent and Mountain Scourge, is on good terms with the leading citizens of Cape Horn, and they are meditating some desperate mischief which must be nipped in the bud. The head-center of the whole is Colonel Wixwaller, who must be the first man to adorn a tree."

"Hooray!"

"Down wi' Kinkfoot an' the cunnel!"

"Let's go over at once an' scoop the durn thieves o' Cape Horn!"

Such and like exclamations fell from the lips of the assembled miners. The pot was boiling, and it only needed the incendiary torch to set it to bubbling over.

"Men of Quartzville," again shouted Rung Lapstone, "a Vigilantes Committee has been long a necessity in the Idaho hills, and now I propose that you form yourselves into a committee of safety, and choose your leader, and then we will be ready for action."

After this for some minutes all was silent save for the low murmur of voices in the crowd as the miners discussed the situation as presented by their employer.

Presently a tall, bearded man, with the hardest countenance in the whole crowd, pushed his way to the veranda.

"Cap'n Lapstone."

"Eh?" and the mine-owner laughed, and advanced to the front again. "It's you, is it, Sam Crofoot?"

"It's me, pard, and may it please ye, ther boys-bev fixed on you fur cap'n. They know how you tuck the lead at Sure Deal, when ther thievin' dandy was rocked ter sleep under ther shadder o' ther Californy pines, and—"

"That will do," the miner king interrupted, with a frown. "Boys, is it your wish that I act as your captain?"

The last words were raised to a high pitch, and addressed to the crowd.

"That are the racket, Cap!"

"Hurray fur Cap'n Lapstone!"

"Thanks, my friends," said Rung Lapstone, bowing and smiling at the enthusiasm of his followers. "Now, then, listen while I explain the situation, so that you will understand how to act, and *why*."

"Go in, cap'n," grunted Sam Crofoot.

"Cape Horn has been doing its utmost since we came to Quartzville and reopened the mines to belittle our work, and to ruin our business. It may be that the most of you, being so busy in the mines, have not noticed *how* this was being done; but as I have had ample opportunity for observation, I feel that I know whereof I speak."

"You do, pard, bet yer rocks on thet," ejaculated Crofoot, ejecting a huge stream of tobacco spittle against the porch. "Heave ahead, boss, an' 'lighten ther natives. Ther boys what follered yer at Sure Deal, don't need ter be told, but these coyotes—"

"Shut up, Sam! I am talking now."

"Yes, yes, I'm mum, pard," and Sam subsided for the time.

"Colonel Wixwaller, of Cape Horn," proceeded Lapstone, "is at the head of an organization which has for its object the ruin of Quartzville. He has sent men to open a mine under our very noses; these men led by one Graylock. With Graylock, in the business, is Samson Hyte, my enemy, and the enemy to all honest men."

"Hold on, Cap, yer don't say thet Samson Hyte's got inter this 'ere region. Je—"

"Shut up, Sam! Yes, it's true. Permit me to proceed, will you?"

"Sart'in, sart'in, I'm mum," grunted Crofoot.

"I have not yet told the worst. Colonel Wixwaller is in league with the notorious Kinkfoot Karl, who has promised the Cape Horn imps to wipe out Quartzville for a share in the spoils. The Mountain Scourge has a goodly crowd of outlaws, and these, united with the roughs from Cape Horn, will make a most formidable array, and they will stand a show to win the game if we permit them to do it."

"Which we won't by a long ways."

"Never! never!"

"Down wi' ther Greasers o' Cape Horn!"

A smile swept the face of Rung Lapstone.

"I did not mistake the mettle of Quartzvillians," he said in a loud voice. "We can prevent them—"

"An' we *will*, cap'n."

It was Jim Hinstraw who put in this forcible interruption, as he shook a brace of revolvers over his head.

"You bet yer rocks!" and Sam Crofoot waved a bowie above his head. Knives and pistols gleamed in every quarter.

Rung Lapstone was pleased at the demonstration, which he knew meant something, since

but a small quantity of liquor had been imbibed by the crowd thus far, and it was the mine-owner's intention that no more should go down the throats of his partisans until he was ready to execute his purpose.

"What I propose to-night, boys, is to organize and arm ourselves, and this very night strike Cape Horn, and terrorize the scoundrels, before Kinkfoot has time to come to their assistance; then it will be an easy matter to cope with the mountain devil, if he cares to risk his precious carcass in our sight.

"We will send terror to the villainous plotters of Cape Horn, who hope to build up their own town by tearing us down. The fact is, the Horn is nothing but a nest of robbers anyhow, and the sooner they are routed out the better."

"Hurray! Them's the sentiments, boss," shouted Hinstraw.

At this moment a hand fell on the arm of the mine-owner.

"See here, pard, ain't you gain' a little too far?"

Lapstone turned about, to find himself face to face with his trusted adviser, Bob Andrews.

"Ah! Andrews, I'm glad to see you. When did you come?" and the smiling Lapstone held out his hand to his wiry chum.

"Come! I've been back yonder listening to your whole god-blasted harangue since you first opened up."

"Well, and don't you approve?"

"No. You'll run your neck inter a noose, or your head ag'in a knife before you know it, pard," uttered Bob Andrews solemnly.

"Bother your caution, Bob; it's the only way to destroy Kinkfoot Karl and that damnable Colonel Wixwaller."

"And then?"

"Evadne and the colonel's fortune are mine. She is his heiress. The moment I secure her, I will light out for Frisco, and claim the stake. I'm getting tired of this life, and I long to live like a gentleman."

"But you're rich enough now, pard. It's best to let well enough alone; that's my experience. First you know, Little Gaudy's avenger'll be on the trail again."

"Hist! For God's sake don't mention that name here!" cried the mine-owner huskily, for, at mention of the name of one he had murdered, the face of the dead rose before him as it did that night in Deadfall Canyon.

The whole conversation had been carried on in a low tone, not audible to the maddened crowd before the tavern. The sound of voices was increasing in volume, however, and the mad miners of Quartzville were becoming impatient to be led against their neighbors.

While Bob Andrews and the mine-owner were talking, a figure enveloped in a long cloak began to work its way toward the corner of the tavern. In a little time he stood not twenty feet from Rung Lapstone, yet in the shadow of the house, so that he attracted no attention from the excited miners.

"Boss, ain't yer goin' ter kerry on ther waltz?" growled Sam Crofoot at this juncture, swaggering up to the porch again, still brandishing his bowie.

Once more the mine-owner turned toward the crowd.

"Gentlemen, fellow-citizens, we must move at once, since I wish to strike Cape Horn before midnight. We must strike a blow that will send terror to the hearts of the outlaw dogs."

"That's the tork. Hooray!"

Again Sam Crofoot shouted, and brandished his knife.

"Likely as anyway we'll find Kinkfoot Karl at Colonel Wixwaller's, making love to his daughter; he's there the biggest part of the time, and the two are conspiring together, as I told you, to ruin Quartzville."

"Rung Lapstone, you lie!"

The words were flung like the keen edge of a bowie into the face of the mine-owner, causing him to start back in amazement. Who had dared thus beard him among his friends, a veritable lion in his den?

"Who speaks?" cried Rung Lapstone, with his hand on his hip.

"I am the man!"

The next instant the cloaked form strode into the light and confronted the insolent mine-owner, his keen black eyes penetrating to the quick, as he fixed them on the face of Rung Lapstone.

"And who are you, upstart?" thundered Lapstone, now white with rage.

Quickly the man in the cloak stepped back, flung open the long garment, revealing a belt hung with gleaming weapons—a face shadowed by a huge black mustache, and long black hair that swept his shoulders.

His white teeth gleamed under the somber mustache, and then:

"I am Kinkfoot Karl, at your service!" rung from the lips of the stranger.

CHAPTER XX.

HAUNTED BY THE DEAD.

"KINKFOOT KARL!"

The name was uttered in shuddering whispers by more than one present, and Rung Lapstone,

who had laid his hand on the butt of a revolver, dared not draw the weapon. Why?

Instantly with the announcement of his name, the Mountain Scourge had thrust forward both hands, in each of which gleamed a deadly six-shooter.

"Rung Lapstone, you have lied!" uttered Kinkfoot Karl in a loud, stern voice. "Colonel Wixwaller is not connected with me in any way, and those men who dare follow you to Cape Horn, with murder in their hearts, will rue the villainy to their dying day. Remember, I have warned you!"

Then, with his face still to the front the mountain terror receded into the shadows.

"After him!" shouted Rung Lapstone. "Don't let the outlaw escape—a thousand in gold to the man who brings me his head!"

Shots rung out, yells filled the air, and a general rush was made in pursuit of the daring outlaw, but it was all in vain. Kinkfoot Karl made good his escape. The clang of horse-hoofs fell on the ears of all, a mocking laugh, and then the Quartzvillians knew that the Mountain Scourge had escaped.

"The miserable skunk," howled Sam Crofoot a little later, brandishing his knife above his head, "if we'd only got our grip onter him we'd a-fixed him wusser'n we did ther leetle dandy up at Sure Deal, eh, Rung?"

The ruffian leaned against the porch as he spoke, and leered up into the white, startled face of the mine owner.

"Great Caesar! man, don't allude to that, again," uttered Rung Lapstone.

"Eh? Durn it, pard, didn't we fix Leetle Gaudy; though fur—"

Whiz!

The ruffian's remarks were never finished. Rung Lapstone started back with a cry of deepest horror, as he heard a horrible thud, and saw Sam Crofoot sink to the ground with a huge bowie in his brain!

"Just as I told ye, pard," cried Bob Andrews. "Your work to-night has set the avenger once more to work."

"The avenger?" cried Rung Lapstone huskily. "Who is he in Heaven's name?"

"Kinkfoot Karl!"

"Or Samson Hyte—which?"

"Kinkfoot Karl is the avenger I am sure," asserted Bob Andrews with emphasis.

The stout form of Rung Lapstone trembled a little as he laid his hand on the arm of his trusted friend.

"Bob, our only safety lies in the death of this Kinkfoot Karl, and Samson Hyte," uttered the mine-owner in a husky voice.

"Yes."

This was all the answer vouchsafed by Andrews. A horrified crowd had gathered about the dead miner, as Andrews stepped down and drew the knife from his brain. It required some little effort to free the bloody blade.

Once more Bob Andrews stood beside his friend, and held up the bowie for his inspection.

"Come inside, I must take a glass of brandy before I examine the weapon of murder," uttered Lapstone huskily.

Securing a bottle from behind the bar, Lapstone led the way to his private room, where a light was burning. Here the two startled villains consulted together, while the air outside rung with the mad cries of the miners, enraged at the death of Sam Crofoot.

"Look! pard, the Avenger has dared send us a message."

After swallowing several gills of brandy, the mine-owner ventured to examine the murderous bowie.

On one side of the broad handle a bit of white paper had been glued, and on this Rung Lapstone read the message referred to by his companion.

"Remember Little Gaudy! The Avenger is on your track!"

This was all, but it was enough to send a chill to the heart of the scheming mine-owner. It told him that his crime, perpetrated under the mountain shadows of Sure Deal, was not forgotten, and that the same hand that sent death to the life of Dan Bryne eighteen months before, was not far away, and soon would poise the knife for his own life.

Slowly the mine-owner raised his eyes from the reading, and looked directly at the window. His gaze became fixed as by some horrible fascination, and there grew upon his face a look of such unutterable horror as to be positively startling.

"Look!"

The word dropped like the hiss of falling water from the lips of Rung Lapstone. Bob Andrews followed his gaze, and saw, glued to the window, a face that sent a deadly fear to his own heart.

No wonder the mine-owner was unable to utter but the one word, for the face of the dead looked in upon him—had come back from a lonely mountain grave to haunt him, as he promised when the fingers of Rung Lapstone first closed about his throat eighteen months ago.

"My God! it's Little Gaudy!"

This exclamation fell from the lips of Bob Andrews, and then he covered his face with his hands to shut out the terrifying sight.

"Haunted by the dead!" groaned the cowering miner.

The hand of Rung Lapstone fell to his hip, and when it came up, a revolver gleamed in the lamplight.

Then came a stunning crash, a jingle of glass, followed by a mad oath from the miner king.

"Take that, you curse of night!" hissed Rung Lapstone.

He would have sprung to the window to note the effect of his shot, had not a mocking laugh filled his ears, and at the opening made by his bullet, the face of the dead glared in upon him.

"Cowardly assassin, you cannot harm the dead! but the dead will shadow you to your doom!"

Then the face was gone, even while the hollow words of warning filled the ears of Rung Lapstone. He did not fire again, he could not, but sunk like one petrified into a seat.

The bartender came and rattled the door, and asked to know what the shooting was for. This revived the two men, and Rung Lapstone opened the door and told the man it was all right, only a little target practice.

This was satisfactory, and Bob and Rung were once more alone in the room.

"Great Caesar, pard, what do you make of it?"

Bob Andrews presented a pale face to the gaze of his companion.

"It beats the devil," growled Rung Lapstone. "My soul! it looked like the little dandy of Sure Deal, yet it cannot be; no, it cannot, for he ain't on earth to-night."

"But it was Little Gaudy," asserted Bob Andrews. "His spirit has come to haunt us. I—I've half a mind to believe we did wrong in killin' the kid. Maybe he wasn't guilty after all."

"Look here, Bob, you're getting squeamish all to once," cried Lapstone, who had just taken a long swig at the bottle. "A little of this is what you need to stiffen ye up."

He passed the bottle to the wiry miner, who followed the example of his employer, and when the bottle was drained, both men felt in a condition to defy ghosts or men.

"Now then, to work!" cried Rung Lapstone.

"I mean to make Rome howl to-night. Select thirty of the best men, Bob, and see them well mounted. We've got that many good horses I think. It'll be a surprise to Cape Horn, and the town'll find itself scooped before it wakes up."

"But, pard, ain't this dangerous?" questioned the more cautious Andrews.

"No, I'll kill Colonel Wixwaller this night, and secure Evadne. He went back on me to-day. Get out the boys, we must move quickly."

Rung Lapstone was deeply under the influence of his potations. Ghosts nor men could stop him now, and Bob Andrews, realizing the situation, went out to obey the orders of the mine-owner.

Men were ready and willing to go and avenge the death of Sam Crofoot, who, though not a favorite in Quartzville, was not the only one who had fallen by the fatal knife, and believing that Cape Horn harbored and approved the assassin's work, the miners were anxious to destroy the rival town.

Two hours before midnight, six and thirty mounted men rode out of Quartzville on a mission of vengeance. Not a sound fell on the air as the troop moved away, save the clank of horse-hoofs against the hard mountain soil.

A cloud of destruction was certainly moving down to overwhelm Cape Horn in red ruin. When once out of the town Rung Lapstone gave the order to forward, and away went the miners at a mad gallop, along the mountain road that would take them to the doors of their enemies.

Scarcely had the thirty men departed, when a man, clad in the habiliments of an ordinary miner, entered the light that filled the street of Quartzville. His breeches were of buckskin, and from his belt depended knife and revolver. His form was of gigantic proportions, and one glance into his jolly red face, reveals his identity.

Samson Hyte.

He had seen the mounted troop depart, and wondered not a little at it, since the move was certainly an unusual one.

"Their boys are on a bender, ter-night," explained a ragged individual whom Hyte questioned. "They've gone down ter Cape Horn fer ter burn an' destroy. Twixt you 'n' me, pard, they won't hev sich an easy time on't. Ho! ho!"

"No. Who leads 'em?"

"Ther big chief in course."

"Rung Lapstone?"

"You bet."

The questioner turned quickly and hurried away in the darkness, toward a lower level of the mountain.

"So ther coyote hez made a break at last," muttered Samson Hyte, as he hurried along the mountain path. "By gracious! the skunk's showin' his hand early, but he'll miss the pint. Graylock shell know of this, and with Storm under me, I won't be long goin' ter Cape Horn. Fun ter-night, sure's shootin'."

Thus soliloquized Samson Hyte as he hurried

on his way. In a little time he halted beside a mountain cabin, from which a light gleamed.

Passing inside he encountered Burril Graylock, to whom he imparted his news.

CHAPTER XXI.

A MIDNIGHT RAID.

COLONEL WIXWALTER slept soundly on the night following the day of his encounter with Rung Lapstone. Nevertheless dreams visited his brain. Once more he was with his wife and three little boys, gathered about the household hearth in old Missouri.

The scene changed magically. A horrible face, painted and crowned with feathers—the hideous face of a savage, filled his vision, and a gleaming tomahawk flashed before his eyes, followed immediately by a sickening thud, and then—Great Heaven! his own wife lay before him, with her head crushed by the cruel tomahawk of the merciless savage.

Strong hands seized his boys and dashed out their brains against projecting rocks. Yells and groans filled his ears, and a hissing of flames, and pungent odor filled his nostrils. It was horrible! With a great cry, the colonel sprang upright and opened his eyes, while the sweat stood in great drops on his pallid brow.

What was that?

A wild scream filled his ears, a sickening glare came into the window, and then some yells, and the loud crack of rifles and revolvers.

The dream was not all a dream after all.

Quickly Colonel Wixwalter sprang from his bed, drew on his clothes hastily, and opened his door. With a quick stride he reached the door of Evadne's room.

It stood open, and the colonel's heart was still with a sudden, awful fear. Quickly he rushed into the room. Light streamed in at the window, to reveal the fact that the bed was empty, and the room vacant.

His daughter was gone!

That scream still rung in the ears of Colonel Wixwalter, and his first thought was that the town had been attacked by Indians. For some moments the colonel groped about blindly, hardly knowing what to do.

"Evadne—Evadne!" he called loudly; but no answer came, and then his worst fears seemed realized.

His daughter had been carried off by the Indians!

It was a terrible thought.

Springing to the outer door, the colonel glared about in the dim light. Eighty rods away the glow of burning buildings illumined the heavens, while yells and the crack of fire-arms filled his ears.

"Indians, sure enough!"

Colonel Wixwalter was about to spring back and seek arms, when two forms appeared in front of the cabin.

Crack! crack!

Two bright flashes, and a pair of leaden bullets were buried in the logs of the colonel's shanty over his head.

"S'render, you durn sardine!"

They were not Indians, but white men, miners, who advanced upon the colonel.

"Boys, why are you shooting at me? What is the meaning of this racket? Where is my daughter?"

"I'll show yer!"

The two men were now within two paces of the colonel, whose foolhardiness in not fleeing while yet there was time was now evident. He found himself looking into the hollow tube of a six-shooter.

"Yer time's emoe, cunnel—die!"

A sharp report followed, but it was not the miner's pistol that exploded. Instead, the would-be assassin's hand fell shattered at his side, while a howl of pain filled the air.

From an unseen source came several reports in rapid succession, and with mad cries the two ruffians whirled and fled.

"Run, yeou ugly sinners! S'pect I made a hole in one o' them darned scamps. Git up, Bugs, an' we'll see w'ats got inter the cunnel."

Right well did Colonel Wixwalter understand who his savior was, and he was soon shaking Pete Homespun by the hand, as he sat his little mustang in front of the cabin.

"Golly, didn't they run though!"

"What's the trouble down yonder?"

"A good deal, I reckon," articulated Yankee Pete. "I swow, I was waked up by the tarmeldest racket out of Bawston, and soon's I got out I made fur the stable, 'coz I tho't of hoss-thieves at once. A big rascal was jest unhitchin' Bugs when I laid him out with the butt of my pistol, then I made tracks fur this pint, to kinder look arter yeou, cunnel."

"Very thoughtful in you, Pete—"

"Yaas, I know'd it. The Open Hand's havin' a hard time of it, I swow. There's a pile of the ugliest-lookin' cusses on hosses, shootin' and yellin', yeou ever see, and one on 'em's Rung Lapstone."

"Rung Lapstone!"

Light seemed suddenly to dawn upon the brain of Colonel Wixwalter. This then was the mine-owner's revenge. His daughter torn from her home, and Cape Horn terrorized. It

all emanated from the trouble of the previous day, and Harris Maltby was at the bottom of the whole affair.

The colonel had no idea that the night attack was anything more than a blind, for the purpose of robbing him of his daughter. He went at once inside, and strapping on his revolvers, hurried with Yankee Pete to the scene of strife, and here a sight met his gaze that surprised and astonished him beyond measure.

Several houses were in flames, and a crowd of mounted men was riding up and down the illuminated street, yelling and firing at every person they could see, and even into the windows of the houses.

The Open Hand bar-room was open, and a number of Quartzvillians had full possession. Bottles were broken and whisky spilled upon the floor. The door was demolished, and Irish Dan, who slept behind the same, was being beaten and roughly handled.

"Down wi' Kinkfoot's pards!"

"Death to every durned skunk as gits his pap from ole Wixwalter!"

Several men had been dragged forth, and beaten and shot, and now lay weltering in their blood on the hard ground. It was a terrible sight indeed.

Colonel Wixwalter saw nothing of Rung Lapstone, but many of the mounted men he recognized as miners in his employ. Resistance was sure to result in death, and for the time Cape Horn was completely at the mercy of Rung Lapstone's villains.

Colonel Wixwalter did not expose his person on the spot, but he entered the tavern by the back way, accompanied by Pete Homespun, the latter consenting to leave Bugs secreted in the bushes a little way out of the village.

The proprietor of the tavern and several boarders were up, and huddled together on the upper floor, badly frightened.

"Great Cæsar! boys, isn't there arms in the house?" cried the colonel, as he came bounding into the presence of the frightened men.

"Yes," admitted Gardner, the landlord, "but they've killed Irish Dan, and every feller thet peeps hez to go down. It's scaly business tryin' ter git away with sich a crowd."

"Follow me," cried out Colonel Wixwalter, sharply. "Here's six of us, and we've all got revolvers. Quick! we can clear the house, and make it warm for these scoundrels yet."

The enthusiasm of the colonel was contagious, and the little company followed at his heels, the slight, awkward moving form, and white "plug" of Pete Homespun being more conspicuous than any other object in the crowd.

Soon the party gained the bar-room door and, with a yell, burst upon the invaders. It was not Colonel Wixwalter's policy to kill save when necessary, so, in the present instance, he used the butt of his revolvers, laying about him lustily. His companions, however, began firing, and nearly raised the roof with their yells. The assault was astonishing, and the Quartzvillians, taken completely by surprise, were driven pell-mell from the house.

Quickly the doors were closed and barricaded, and preparations made for a vigorous defense of the tavern.

Irish Dan, though badly bruised, was found able to speak, and with but few bones broken. He was taken into an adjoining room and placed on a cot, where he would be out of further danger for the present.

Cries of "burn the house," and fierce oaths filled the air without.

A fusilade of bullets rattled against the building, and some of the pellets crashed through the windows.

"We're in fur it now," uttered Gardner.

"We are, and some of those scoundrels will die if they attempt to enter here," cried the colonel.

"Better gi'n 'em a shot. I swow, I feel creepy all over," put in Pete Homespun. "Ah, me! I'll hev a heap of doctorin' arter this. But I ain't no surgeon, never pretended I was. Great jewhilkins!"

The latter exclamation was caused by the Yankee's hat going to the floor with a bullet-hole through the crown. Had he been an inch taller, Pete Homespun's mortal career would have been then and there closed.

"Waal, I swow, a short man has the advantage sometimes," uttered Yankee Pete, as he coolly lifted his white plug from the floor, and considerably stepped into a less exposed position.

Colonel Wixwalter, who was watching movements outside, saw that the men were collecting near the tavern for a general rush. The move was never made, however.

Why not?

A distant roar, a loud cheer, and then came a band of mounted men, straight down the street upon the assembled Quartzvillians. Like an avalanche swept the new-comers, firing revolvers as they advanced.

A panic seized the invaders, and a hasty flight was the result.

Pop! pop! the revolvers cracked, but not a word fell from the silent troop as it swept on. At the head rode a small man, wearing a Mexi-

can sombrero, a cloak sweeping backward from his shoulders, one small, deformed foot plainly visible as his steed dashed swiftly by.

"Kinkfoot Karl!"

The name fell involuntarily from the lips of Colonel Wixwalter.

"Hal the mountain coyote is after them," ejaculated Lardner.

"If Kinkfoot's arter 'em, he'll make 'em climb, I swow," articulated the Yankee. And he was right. The mob of roughts under Lapstone was scattered, and Cape Horn was saved. To Kinkfoot Karl, the Mountain Scourge, the little mining-village owed its salvation.

Would her citizens prove ungrateful!

CHAPTER XXII.

"HANDS UP!"

Two men were riding along the mountain road leading from Quartzville to Cape Horn.

"We can't be far behind the villains, Samson," said the well-known voice of Burril Graylock, as the two approached the entrance to Deadfall Canyon.

"I dunno," responded Samson Hyte. "They had an hour the start. I think, like enough, they're tearin' inter Cape Horn afore this."

This was not reassuring to the young prospector, whose thoughts were centered on Evadne, who, he believed, was in great danger.

"On, then, we must not lose a moment's time," cried the eager young man.

"Don't make too fast down the canyon, pard," uttered Samson Hyte, remonstratingly. "Thar may be an ambush, and it ar' well enough ter go slow, and hev our weapons ready fur use."

As they entered the dark canyon Burril Graylock slackened the pace of his steed, and soon the two men were passing cautiously forward, and the wisdom of the course was soon made manifest, for, when less than half-way through the canyon, the sound of clanging hoofs struck the ears of the mounted twain.

"Hist! somebody comes!"

With the words, Burril Graylock drew his horse to one side of the canyon, while Samson Hyte followed his example by taking the other, and then they waited for the approach of the horsemen.

Glancing sharply ahead, Graylock caught occasional sparks as they were struck from the flinty bed of the canyon by the horse's hoofs.

And Samson Hyte, who was listening intently, soon discovered that there were but two persons riding along the canyon, but it was too dark to make out their forms. It would not do to let them pass, however, and when almost opposite, the giant miner pushed forward a revolver and cried:

"Hands up, pard!"

Perhaps the two strange horsemen would have made a dash for liberty had not a second voice hailed them from the opposite side.

"Ay! hands up, and give an account of yourselves!"

These were startling words, and the new-comers were badly demoralized, and not a little frightened, albeit one of them was as brave a villain as Rung Lapstone had in his service.

Scarcely had the hail fallen from the lips of Burril Graylock, when a great cry filled the air.

"Burril, Burril, save me! I am in the hands of two of Kinkfoot's men!"

It was not a vain appeal that fell on the startled senses of young Graylock. He recognized the voice at once as that of Evadne Wixwalter, and realized the situation instantly. Matters had been gravely complicated however, by the maiden's outcry. With an oath, the villain who held the girl in front of him, grasped her throat and prevented any further outcry, while, at the same time, he turned his horse, and with a defiant shout, dashed madly on the return trail.

The man's companion followed suit.

"Shoot the durn cusses," cried Samson Hyte, and with his voice came a sharp flash and report.

"Hold, in Heaven's name!" thundered Graylock, as he rode quickly to the side of the giant miner and grasped his arm.

"Don't fret, pard, them cusses ain't good 'nough ter live any longer," articulated Samson Hyte, hissing.

"That may be true, but you will kill the girl. You must not fire again. Come on, and we will soon overtake the scoundrels."

Away dashed the young prospector, closely followed by his giant companion.

It was a hot race through the narrow confines of the canyon. Not daring to shoot, the two men pressed the pair of villains hotly, yet were unable to render any assistance to the captive maiden.

On and on dashed the four horsemen at a mad pace down the canyon. In a few minutes the night seemed to lighten, and objects were becoming visible to the strained vision of the pursuing twain. The open ground beyond the dark canyon was visible.

Just as the four horsemen broke out into the light, the hindmost of the pursued went to the ground. His horse had stumbled.

"Go on, youngster!" shouted Samson, "I'll tend ter this coyote!"

The foremost of the two villains still kept his saddle and was straining every muscle to escape; and, as he had the maiden in his possession, Graylock minded not the one who had fallen, but swept past in hot pursuit of the maiden's captor. The race was a fierce one. The abductor's horse soon showed signs of being winded, and Bob Andrews, for he it was, wheeled suddenly from the mountain road, and dashed his horse into a thicket.

The animal was completely exhausted now, and Andrews, who was working to please his master, slipped from the animal's back and, with Evadne in his arms, pushed his way into a mountain gorge, the sides of which were thickly lined with bushes.

He had on his trail, however, a relentless pursuer—one who would not give over the pursuit while life lasted.

After entering the gorge a short distance, the marauder came to a halt and listened, his left hand pressed over the maiden's mouth to prevent an outcry. In his right he clutched a cocked revolver. The eyes of the hunted man gleamed like stars as, pantingly, he watched and waited for the coming of his foe.

The sound of crashing steps some distance away fell on the man's ears, but these soon died away, and Bob Andrews breathed easier. He allowed his hand to fall from his captive's mouth, but said by way of precaution:

"One yell from you, miss, will seal your doom. I'm a desp'it man, and will not be balked."

This was enough to seal the maiden's lips.

The minutes passed slowly.

No new sounds broke the stillness, and after a little Bob Andrews felt like himself once more. The danger of discovery was over, but he must make his way to the neighborhood of Quartzville and inform Rung Lapstone of the situation. Andrews had performed his part of the contract, and would now seek his reward.

When first seized, Evadne had been told that she was to be taken before Kinkfoot Karl, but all the time there was a vague suspicion in her mind that this was not true. She had met the noted outlaw once, and he did not seem to be a bad man. The girl could not reconcile the work of to-night with the gentle-voiced outlaw.

She had slept little during the fore part of the night. In fact the scenes of the day so occupied her mind as to almost drive sleep from her eyelids, and she had not removed her clothing when she sunk upon the bed just after midnight to fall into a doze that gave her into the hands of her father's enemies but a few moments later.

In a little time after Bob Andrews and his fair captive sought shelter in the mountain gorge, the gray streaks of day dawned in the East.

"It is safe for us now to be on the move," uttered Andrews.

He glanced about sharply in the gray light, and then laid his hand on Evadne's arm to lead her forward, when a sharp whiz reached her ear, followed instantly by a terrible *thud*, and the next instant Bob Andrews crouched in a heap at her feet, utterly bereft of life for the time.

Evadne looked up quickly.

"I guess he'll lay quiet for the present, Miss Wixwalter."

It was Burril Graylock, who stood boldly up on a jutting crag, some twenty feet above the position occupied by captive and captor. Evadne uttered a little glad cry.

"I've been on the lookout during the past two hours," pursued Graylock, "and as I lost the trail in the darkness, I made up my mind that this miserable coyote couldn't go far until daylight, so I waited, and when the first streaks of dawn came, I was about to resume the search, when I heard noises down in this gorge. With cautious steps I crept forward, and discovered you and Bob Andrews. Yes, I know the villain and he is not one of Kinkfoot's men, but a tool of Rung Lapstone's. I just dropped a bit of rock on his head, believing it better than shooting the wretch."

Then Graylock made his way from the crag to the bottom of the gorge, and stood beside Evadne.

It was a joyous meeting the reader may be sure, and the grateful look that filled the gray eyes of the beautiful girl was ample reward for his efforts in her behalf.

"I am terribly anxious regarding my father," said the maiden. "As my abduction was the work of Rung Lapstone, I fear my father has been murdered. Oh, you do not know what a terribly wicked man Lapstone is. He tried to kill my father yesterday, and would have succeeded, but for the timely coming of a noble man, who called himself Samson Hyte."

"He is in my employ. I heard of the trouble, and knew that was not the last of it. I do know Rung Lapstone. Once, in disguise, he attempted to murder me, but an unseen hand frightened him away."

"An unseen hand?"

"Yes; but I mistrust it was the hand of Kinkfoot Karl, one of the most wonderful men in the West."

Then the youth explained the incident where the masked man, who he was sure was Rung Lapstone, made an attempt upon his life, and had his revolver stricken from his hand by a well-aimed bowie.

"I feel grateful to this strange little man, and feel that there is some mystery about the fellow."

Leaving the villain, Andrews, where he had fallen, Graylock led Evadne from the spot.

"My horse is less than half a mile away," he said, "and once there, we won't be long in getting away from this region."

Walking on, and chatting earnestly, the young couple turned a point of rock and then came to a sudden halt, a low yet startled cry falling from the lips of Evadne.

They had run upon a party of six men, stout-looking fellows, who were armed to the teeth. "Hands up, pard!"

Several revolvers fell to a level as this order rung on the air.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CAPTURED BY OUTLAWS.

BURRIL GRAYLOCK started back, with his hand on his revolver, but as six revolvers stared him in the face, he realized that it would be madness to resist.

"Draw and die!" hissed the foremost of the six men.

There was no help for it. Burril Graylock did not draw, but stood the picture of helpless dismay, with Evadne clinging to his arm. She had passed through so many dangers, she was quite calm after the first outcry. She feared more for her companion than for herself. The spokesman of the six was not a bad-looking man, and a smile touched his face when he saw that Graylock was disposed to make the best of the inevitable.

"It is well, young man," he said. "Nick Overton does not permit trifling. Please hand over your revolver."

But now Burril Graylock stood facing the men with folded arms, and refused to comply with the man's request.

"You won't do it, eh?"

"No," answered the young prospector. "I will not turn my weapons over to you. I am at your mercy, however, and if you choose to rob me you can do so, but the authorities of Idaho shall know of this outrage."

"Ho! ho!"

This alone was Nick Overton's answer, as he proceeded to relieve the young man of his weapons. Then he cast an admiring look at Evadne.

"A mighty pretty girl. I reckon you're the darter of old Cunnel Wixwalter, of Cape Horn, eh?"

"The colonel is my father."

"I thought so. What's the cunnel now?"

"I cannot say."

"No? Wal, that's bad. There was a desperate scrimmage over to ther Horn last night, and I guess the citazerns was pretty badly scared. Ole Lapstone got among 'em and made the fur fly for a spell. Ho! ho!"

This speech certainly proved that these men did not belong to Lapstone's gang; at any rate, Graylock so interpreted it. And this fact gave him no little relief, since he knew that the partisans of Rung Lapstone were more dangerous enemies than even the mountain robbers.

Evadne eagerly questioned Overton regarding her father, but he was unable, or unwilling, to give her any information.

"I didn't see the cunnel at all, las' night," said the fellow with a grin. "We made it hot fer ther miner king o' Quartzville, though."

"We?" questioned Graylock eagerly.

"Kinkfoot's lads," said the man. But he would say no more on the subject. He ordered one of his men to secure the arms of Graylock with a cord.

To this the young man objected.

"I am not a friend of Lapstone, and will go peaceably without being bound."

"It don't make no difference," said Overton. "I think yer safer triced up."

And soon the young prospector's hands were secured behind him, the knot being inspected by Overton himself, to see that it was well done.

"Now then, miss, ef you'll keep along, you sha'n't be hurt nor scolded; but you can't git away, that's all."

The party then left the neighborhood, and pursued a course that led them further into the mountains.

In the course of an hour they came to a halt in a little belt of cedars that clustered at the foot of a high ridge. Grass grew on a level plot of some acres in extent, and altogether it was a pleasant little mountain hole into which the outlaws had debouched. Several horses were picketed in the belt of timber, and not far away was a group of men, who sat about a fire that was kindled next a rock at the foot of the hill.

This was the outlaw retreat, doubtless.

Graylock was struck with the open countenances and noble bearing of the men in general, and remarked it to Evadne.

"They will compare favorably with the best citizens of Cape Horn, and I wonder how such men can be led to commit such woeful depredations as report credits them with."

Evadne made no reply. She saw a man approaching who was not an utter stranger to her. He came from the same direction the party of six had lately followed, and bestrode a powerful-looking mustang.

Forward he dashed, and drew rein in front of the prisoners. As he slipped from the saddle, a surprised exclamation fell from his lips. Walking forward, he held out his hand to Evadne.

"I am surprised but pleased to find you here," uttered the man, whose black eyes sparkled like twin stars from under his sombrero.

"No doubt of it," was Evadne's reply. "You war on women and children after all, it seems."

"Nonsense! It was not my men who tore you from your home, and assaulted and tried to destroy Cape Horn."

Kinkfoot Karl stood back with folded arms and looked fixedly, yet haughtily, at the fair maid of the mountain. He did not speak to Graylock, but after a moment strode over to the side of Nick Overton, and from that personage learned how the two young people came to be in their present situation.

Once more the mountain outlaw walked back to his prisoners, a peculiar smile playing about his mustached lip.

"Since you are here, Burril Graylock, and you, Miss Wixwalter, it is best for you to remain for a time."

"As prisoners?"

"No, as guests of Kinkfoot Karl," answered the outlaw, coolly.

"In that case you will release my hands?"

"Ah, I had not noticed."

With the words, Kinkfoot Karl went to the side of the young man, and, with the edge of a bowie, severed the cord that bound his arms.

"Nick was over-harsh," he said. "Hope you will excuse him, Mr. Graylock, since he meant everything for the best."

"Of course. I am free to go?"

"If you choose."

Graylock turned to Evadne, and said:

"Come; we will return to Cape Horn. You are anxious to see your father, and I am more than anxious to meet and punish Rung Lapstone for the base work of last night."

Evadne would gladly have followed the young prospector from the place, had not the slight form under the Mexican sombrero interposed. Standing in the path, with folded arms, Kinkfoot Karl regarded the young twain with flashing eyes.

"Young man," he cried sternly, "is it not enough that I have permitted you to go free? You must leave this girl here. Go if you will, but Evadne Wixwalter will remain under my protection."

"Indeed!"

Burril Graylock faced the strange outlaw with white face and wrathful mien.

"Dare you detain this girl against her will, you—"

A light touch on his arm cut short the violent speech that trembled on the lips of the young mine prospector.

He looked into a pair of gray eyes, that held in their depths a warning that he knew it was well to heed.

"Finish your speech, young man," said Kinkfoot Karl grimly. "I know what you would say. When you talk of daring, you hit me in a tender spot. I have dared a great many things to compass a bloody vengeance on men who, long ago, learned to tremble at the name of Kinkfoot Karl. I dare detain this girl, and I dare also detain you, Burril Graylock. In fact, since you have flung down the gauntlet, I will take it up. You cannot leave my camp."

"Then I am a prisoner after all?" uttered Graylock in dismay.

"You are. I decide to hold you for a time. I have a mission of vengeance to perform which you may interfere with, so I shall hold you here for some days at least."

Graylock was chagrined at this.

"On whom will your vengeance fall?"

"Rung Lapstone, a thief and a murderer!" uttered Kinkfoot Karl in solemn accents. "Do you know what he has done? Did you ever hear of Sure Deal?"

The slender form of Kinkfoot Karl trembled with visible emotion.

"Sure Deal? Oh, yes; Samson Hyte has mentioned that, and the woeful tragedy that caused him to leave the gold-diggin's, and turn his face toward the silver hills of Idaho."

"Samson Hyte? I remember; he was Little Gaudy's friend; but one against sixteen was too great odds. If he told you the story, you know how deep and damnable is the guilt that reddens the hands and blackens the soul of Rung Lapstone. He robbed his partner and killed my friend Little Gaudy, because he would not confess to a lie. Ah, I've wreaked a fearful vengeance thus far, and the rope that the murderer king of Quartzville wears about his neck is all run out—his doom is near at hand!"

A fierce glow came to the eyes of the speaker,

and for the moment he seemed transformed into a vengeful demon.

"This boy, Little Gaudy, was a very dear friend?"

"The dearest friend I had in the wide world," answered Kinkfoot Karl. "He and I followed the mountain trail together for months. We were seeking a white coyote, who wronged Little Gaudy beyond measure. We did not find him, although, sometimes, it seems to me that Rung Lapstone may be the man. There were sixteen demons who assisted the murder of my boy friend, and more than half of them have gone to their account. Who sent them there? Look!"

With the word, Kinkfoot Karl flung his loose cloak backward, revealing a belt full of glittering knives—bowie blades, and all of one size and make.

"When I am on the path of vengeance I carry the belt of knives. Look!"

A huge bowie came to the hand of Kinkfoot Karl, and the next instant he waved it aloft, pointing with his left hand to a small woodpecker that was at work on a stub thirty yards away. Scarcely had the bird come under the eyes of Graylock and Evadne, when the gleaming blade left the outlaw's hand.

A gleam of light, a faint flutter, and the bird was pinned to the tree by the gleaming bowie.

Graylock uttered a cry of admiration at this wonderful skill, and a grim smile swept the face of Kinkfoot Karl as he caught the look of wonder on Evadne's face.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HAUNTED VILLAINS.

RUNG LAPSTONE was a mad and disappointed man as well he might be. His grand scheme for the destruction of Cape Horn, the death of Colonel Wixwaller, and seizure of the beautiful Evadne had failed.

And why had it failed?

Simply because Kinkfoot Karl, with his mountain outlaws, had come to the rescue of Cape Horn, and rushed his own partisans out of the place at a double-quick.

Where was Evadne? The colonel had escaped, but as yet the king of Quartzville had heard nothing from the two men who were to seize and bear the pretty daughter of the Cape Horn colonel to a cave in the hills, where she was to remain a prisoner at the mercy of Lapstone for the time.

It was daylight when the king of Quartzville reached his tavern, and he was swearing mad, really boiling over with vengeful wrath.

In twos and threes his scattered partisans came in. Two had been killed, and several others were missing. Once more in front of the Miner's Paradise Rung Lapstone harangued his discomfited partisans, and assured them that a second attempt on the rival village would prove more successful.

Liquor was free, and the crowd of toughs soon were happy drunk, on whisky furnished by the captain of the expedition.

It was noon when Rung Lapstone crossed the threshold of Bob Andrews's cabin, to see if he had returned. The cabin was empty, but he found something on the floor that gave him a start. A bowie-knife, with bloody blade, was sticking in the center of the floor. The point of the knife pierced the picture of a human heart on paper, with the words scrawled in an ungainly hand beneath.

"A few more hearts—then yours, Harris Maltby!"

An oath fell from the lips of the startled mine-owner.

"Death and furies!" he ground through his teeth. "Is this haunting demon going to follow me like this always? Curses on the scoundrel! Who could have come here and left this? Why was it left in Andrews's cabin, and for me? Ha! I have it! Andrews is one of the sixteen!"

Rung Lapstone reeled back with the bloody bowie in his hand just as a rasping stepsounded without. The next instant, the door was flung open, and Bob Andrews stood face to face with his employer.

Flinging aside his knife, Rung Lapstone grasped the hand of his tool and gave it a strong pressure.

"Great Harry! Bob, I've been dying to see you. Seem's to me you've been an awful while, carting the minx to the mountains. Where is she? Safe and anxiously awaiting my coming?"

There was a look on the face of Bob Andrews, however, that revealed plainly enough a far different state of facts. He was pale, and an angry glare was in his eyes. Sinking into a seat, he clasped his aching head between his hands and groaned aloud, at the same time giving vent to an oath indicative of his pent-up wrath.

"The girl be blanked!" finally articulated Bob Andrews. "Ther critter's a darn sight more trouble'n she's wuth."

"See here, Bob, explain yourself, and not fling mud at Evadne. Where is she? What has happened?"

Rung Lapstone sat down on a block of wood, and ignoring thoughts of the knife and pierced heart, turned his attention to the subject that

occupied his mind when he first entered the cabin.

"Whar she is I can't say, pard," grated Andrews. "I do know I got the darn'dest crack on ther skull, and when I come out the bad spell it give me, girl and friends were gone, the deuce knows whar."

"Whar friends? How did it all happen?"

Andrews related the events in which he was an actor during the night, and when he had finished, the face of Rung Lapstone was purple with rage.

"Most likely the girl's back to her home before this, then, if Graylock was the man who got her away from you."

"Wal, that's what I don't know," uttered Andrews. "I know somethin' dropped. From that time on I didn't know nothin', till a little bit ago, when I got up and made tracks fur Quartzville. Maybe the girl's back home, maybe she's in the hands o' Kinkfoot Karl; I ain't prepared to state, but I've got one of ther darn'dest headaches, I know that much, that I can swear to."

Judging from the terrible grimaces on the face of the speaker, he had not exaggerated in the least.

Before either could speak again, the cabin door was flung open, and a giant form crossed the threshold and confronted the two men.

Rung Lapstone sprung to his feet with an oath.

But swearing would not avail him just then, for a cocked revolver stared him in the face, and that weapon, in the hand of a cool person, is a most potent persuader.

"Sit down, Rung Lapstone!"

Back to his seat with a growl went the mine-owner.

Bob Andrews did not attempt to spring up. He, too, caught the glitter of a steel barrel pointing at his breast, and, believing with one of old, that discretion was the better part of valor, he remained seated.

"Samson Hyte, how dare you come here?" growled Lapstone at length, as he glared, as a baffled tiger might, into the broad, red face of the young giant miner.

"I ain't afeard to go whar rogues like you fear ter tread," uttered Samson grimly. "I see'd a big crowd of drunken sardines round yer shanty when I came past. One of 'em sassed me, and I come nigh makin' a corpse of 'im. He kinder tho't 'twas time ter take 'nother drink, and dodged in. I inquired fur the boss, an' one leetle cuss sent me here. Am glad to meet both you fine gentlemen, who was two the hardest pills Sure Deal could boast in the long ago. What I'm after though's the girl, and my pard, Graylock."

"You'll find neither here," growled the mine-owner in answer.

"No, I didn't expect ter. But you kin tell a feller whar they be."

"I can't."

"You won't."

"I tell you I can't. I'm not the girl's keeper." "Mebbe not; but yer wanted ter be bad enough. So yer sw'ar yer don't know nothin' 'bout ther girl."

"You heard what I said."

"I did, and I'm prepared ter say I think yer lie," uttered Samson Hyte grimly. "Me'n my young pard was down beyond Deadfall Canyon last night, and we run afoul two devils thet hed ther girl."

Here Bob Andrews pricked up his ears.

"One of ther cusses lays nigh ther mountain trail wi' his neck cracked, dead's a mackerel. T'other one got off with Miss Evadne, and somehow, in ther darkness, my pard got out my sight, and I lost him and t'other varmint."

The honest eyes of Samson Hyte were fixed on both faces before him, but Rung Lapstone was equal to the occasion.

"Samson," he said, "the moment there's any wickedness in the wind, you at once connect me with it."

"'Coz ye'r the meanest cuss in Idaho, that's why."

"I know you owe me a grudge for doing my duty some months ago; but let that pass. For once you're on the wrong trail."

"Mebbe."

"You are, my honey-bee, for I don't know a thing about Colonel Wixwaller's girl. As you say, I wish I did. If she's been torn from her home, I think you'll find her abductors in Kinkfoot Karl's camp. I admit I was down to Cape Horn on a little tear last night, but—"

"You needn't talk no more," the young giant interrupted, with a grate of his white teeth. "Ef you've harmed my pard, Burril, I'll rid Idaho of a thief and murderer, 'member that!"

Then, with a menacing look at the two villains, Samson Hyte turned and rushed from the cabin.

Instantly Rung Lapstone sprung to his feet, but a detaining hand was laid on his arm, and held him from rushing madly in pursuit of the giant miner.

"No use, pard; he'd bore you if you tried it. Let him go jest now."

Lapstone turned fiercely on his detainer, but Andrews soon calmed the miner king's rage, and once more he sunk to a seat. At this mo-

ment the bloody bowie, with the pierced heart, came under the notice of Bob Andrews, and he questioned his employer about it.

But Rung Lapstone was unable to give any satisfactory explanation.

Bob Andrews's face was white, and he seemed deeply moved when he read the awful warning.

"Great Heaven! Rung, can we not escape this doom?"

"Well, I mean to. When two men die the avenger of Little Gaudy will pass in his checks, and we are safe. But for you, one of the men would have gone under just now."

"Eh?"

"I mean Samson Hyte."

"I don't believe it. He had the chance jest now to put both of us under and he didn't do it."

"Well, that don't signify. We may be set aside as the especial marks for Kinkfoot Karl's bowie. I tell you whar, Bob; while those two men live we are in hourly danger. We must put them under at once."

Again the miner king sprung to his feet.

He did not go to the door, however. This stood ajar, and through the aperture came the crunching sound of a heavy tread approaching the cabin.

"Hist! some one is coming!" uttered Lapstone, in a stage whisper. Then he moved toward the door.

Bob Andrews likewise gained his feet, and drew a revolver. He felt like a hunted beast, and every suspicious sound sent cold chills to his heart. He had witnessed the work of the Avenger, and realized that at any moment his time might come.

Rung Lapstone's hand was already on the door, when it was pushed violently open, and a tall form confronted the Quartzville king of the mines.

The miner boss reeled back with a low, amazed cry. The man who confronted him he had hoped lay dead in Cape Horn.

It was Colonel Wixwaller!

CHAPTER XXV.

A BAFFLED SCOUNDREL.

"SCOUNDREL! where is my daughter?"

These were the words flung in the face of the astonished mine-owner by the white-faced man, who burst so suddenly upon the vision of Rung Lapstone and his pard. To give emphasis to his demand, the Cape Horn colonel had thrust a revolver into the countenance of his enemy.

"I? Great Caesar! what do you mean?" were the words that dropped from the lips of the startled mine-owner.

"I mean, scoundrel, that I have tracked the abductors here! I will not repeat to you what occurred in the dark hours of last night, since you know full well the whole dark story. Your infamous attempt to destroy Cape Horn failed. Several of our best citizens are dead, however, and the charge of murder will be preferred against you in good time; but to-day I do not come to speak of that. My daughter was torn from her home by wolves in human guise, and I am here to seek her of the man who ordered her abduction. Produce Evadne at once, Harris Maltby, or take the consequences!"

There was a stern ring in the colonel's voice, and a bitter glow in his eyes, that quite startled the wily plotter of Quartzville. A sudden idea flashed into his brain, and he said quickly, and with surprising coolness:

"Put up your pistol, old boy. Act reasonable, and I will talk with you on this subject."

The colonel lowered his weapon.

"Speak quickly, cursed villain! I cannot wait, nor will I permit any fooling."

"It is not a subject on which I would permit myself to show levity," returned the mine-owner, with a lofty assumption of dignity. "I am a square man, and always speak to the point. Honestly, now, did you think I knew aught of the fair Evadne?"

"Scoundrel—"

"Hold up! I see how the case stands," cried the boss of Quartzville, as he saw the rising wrath of the colonel. "No; you are mistaken, Colonel Wixwaller; I am not the man you seek. I call Heaven to witness that I know not where the fair Evadne is. Although I will not deny being at Cape Horn last night, I was not at your house."

"But your tools were!" grated the colonel.

"Again you are wrong; but I can guess who has your daughter."

An incredulous look swept the face of Colonel Wixwaller.

He remembered the quarrel, and the fight he had with this man only the day before, and he could not believe him now. Yet, when he looked closely into the eyes of the mine-owner, he saw something that assured him the man was not lying.

"I will listen to what you have to say," uttered the colonel at length.

"It is but little. I know nothing of the whereabouts of Evadne, but I suspect she may

be in the hands of that diabolical villain, that scourge of the mines, Kinkfoot Karl."

"Rung Lapstone, beware how you deceive me!"

"It is God's truth I am telling you," and the monstrous villain laid his hand over his heart.

"Oh, Heaven! what shall I do?" and a groan of anguish fell from the lips of the perplexed old man.

A tigerish gleam shot into the eyes of Lapstone as the colonel lowered his pistol and, covering his face with his hands, reeled back against the door-jamb.

At that moment Colonel Wixwalter was completely at the mercy of the man who valued him more dead than living. The temptation was great, and Rung Lapstone's hand fell to the butt of his revolver, while his teeth gleamed, and his eyes flashed venomously.

A second he hesitated.

"Not now, not here," he muttered under his breath, and the hand moved away from the deadly weapon without drawing it. Bob Andrews, as a spectator, made no move of any sort.

Presently Colonel Wixwalter recovered himself, and cried:

"I cannot rest until my daughter is found. Until that time our feud, Harris Maltby, must rest."

Then the colonel turned and rushed away.

"Why didn't you bore him through?" Bob Andrews thought to question his employer a moment later.

"Not now. I must secure Evadne first," muttered the mine-owner.

"But the colonel is your deadly enemy. He even went from here with a threat upon his lips. My soul! pard, if you permit all your enemies to go in this way, I fear you won't live long yourself."

"I did not choose to kill the colonel now," returned Lapstone. "I have my reasons for it. I know the colonel, and know him to be a fair and square man; no assassin about him; he will not shoot an enemy in the back. When the time comes, a fair and square fight will decide between us; until then I am content to let John Wixwalter live."

"Ho! You forget last night—"

"No, but I have a different plan in my brain now. Come, let's go over to the tavern. Perhaps we will hear some news there."

Arm in arm the two men walked away toward the Miner's Paradise. Scarcely had they gone, when from the rear of the cabin a crouched form straightened up, and moved cautiously away toward a clump of trees and bushes that grew near.

It was Pete Homespun, the Yankee doctor.

"I have dogged his steps, and played the eavesdropper to no purpose thus far," muttered the Yankee, when he had gained a safe place, beyond danger of discovery. His experience with the Quartzville roughs on a former occasion, led him to move with caution when in the neighborhood of the place.

"Rung Lapstone, as you choose to call yourself, you are playing a deep game I feel sure. Evadne is either in your hands or in the hands of an enemy to John Wixwalter. Ah! my soul, I never expected to see this day. His daughter! She is a lady, too. Doubtless he has forgotten the past. But, no, that cannot be, since he was deeply moved when I spoke of his murdered wife and children. A noble, brave man he is, and if I could only know about the boys—whether they were living or dead. I must watch and wait, watch and wait."

Yankee Pete moved on a little way and encountered Bugs, on whose back he quickly leaped, and was soon riding rapidly from the vicinity of Quartzville.

Night shadows once more settled over the mountains. The season was drawing on apace, and the nights were cool in this mountain region, necessitating abundant clothing to keep out the chill.

A loud clatter of hoofs sounded on the one street of Quartzville, and a score of mounted men dashed up to the door of Miner's Paradise. Here were some loafers, and a few toughs, but Lapstone's old band of hardheads were scattered about the village, the most of them not in a condition for active war, had the mounted band meditated mischief.

A brilliant light glowed from the saloon, as the leader of the mounted men slipped to the ground and stalked into the room, demanding to know the whereabouts of Rung Lapstone.

"I am here, Colonel Wixwalter!"

The next instant, Rung Lapstone appeared from his private office, and confronted the man from Cape Horn.

"Ha! so you did not sneak off as I feared you would," grated the colonel. Then he waved his hand toward the door, where a cordon of mounted men were stationed. "I am here to make a demand, Rung Lapstone, and I come strong-handed enough to enforce my demands."

"So you think to frighten me with this show of force," sneered the miner king. "It can't be done, pard. I know a trick worth two of that, but I won't play it just here and now. What brings you here to-night?"

"I am after my child—Evadne."

"What! still looking here? Did I not tell you that she was not in Quartzville?"

"Yes, but I knew you to be a villain, and lying is as meat and drink to such as you. I demand my child, Rung Lapstone. You will give her up, or the streets of Quartzville shall run red with blood, and I'll tear this ranch down about your ears. Do you hear me, infamous murderer?"

Colonel Wixwalter was trembling with terrible wrath, and he raised and cocked the revolver he held in his hand, as the bitter words, recorded above, fell from his lips.

In spite of the gravity of the situation, Rung Lapstone forced a smile to his bearded lips. How could he do it, with the man standing before him whom he had confessedly wronged beyond power of mortal reparation?

It was his safest course, and he realized it. As the villain had once remarked, Colonel Wixwalter was a square man, and would take no man's life without giving him a show for himself. Knowing this, the blonde and oily-tongued king of Quartzville stood without fear before the mad colonel. Since he appeared to be unarmed, he knew his chivalrous enemy would not strike.

"You use harsh language, my friend, but I forgive you. Why? Simply because the loss of your child has doubtless crazed you. I am sorry. This is a sad case, Colonel Wixwalter, but I must still protest my innocence."

"I will at least put your protestations to the test."

"Well?"

"I will search the tavern."

"Do by all means, my dear John. I want you to satisfy yourself that Evadne is not here, and that I know nothing about her."

Back to the door went the colonel, and ordered two of the men to dismount. One of these he left to watch Rung Lapstone, while with the other he searched the premises. It was a thorough search, from cellar to garret, but no captive maiden was found.

"Are you satisfied, pard?" sneered Rung Lapstone.

"By Heaven! no," thundered the colonel. "I still believe you have secreted the girl somewhere, and I mean to make you reveal her whereabouts."

Then the thoroughly-aroused colonel turned toward the door, as if about to address his partisans without. He did not speak to them then, for a sight met his astounded gaze that rooted his feet to the floor, and caused him to tremble with violent agitation. A door opened from the bar-room, into the hall that separated the dining-room from the saloon. This door had opened and closed with remarkable suddenness, and a person stood, facing Rung Lapstone, and the colonel, with a stern look resting on his face.

It was a smooth-faced boy, whose countenance was corpse-like in its pallor, from which flashed or rather glared in a stony stare, a pair of midnight eyes. A jaunty hat sat upon his head, a gaudily trimmed jacket and trousers covering his frame.

Eighteen months before we saw this youth standing in the light of a mountain fire, bidding defiance to Dan Bryne and a cruel gang of murderers. Now he stood in a singular position, one hand clutching his throat, while the other was extended, pointing at the face of Rung Lapstone.

"Murderer! Your race is run! A few days and the dead will rest in peace, for Rung Lapstone, alias Harris Maltby, will sleep in a bloody grave—*Little Gaudy and Marion Wixwalter will be avenged!*"

For an instant the white-faced apparition stood thus in the glare of the lights, and then—*crack!*

The loud report of a revolver rung through the room, and Rung Lapstone darted past Colonel Wixwalter with a savage oath, a smoking pistol in his hand.

If the mad mine-owner had thought to kill the haunting shadow that came from the grave to accuse him, he was sadly mistaken. When he gained the spot where the specter had stood, it was vacant; the door was closed, and from some unknown source came a mocking laugh, that curdled the blood in the veins of the startled mine-owner.

The most startling effect, however, was upon Colonel Wixwalter, who reeled against the bar, and glared like one utterly dumfounded at the spot where the intruder had stood. Evidently his feelings were too mastering for speech just then.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A REMARKABLE TRUCE.

"My God! it was the face of Marion, my wife!"

With this ejaculation, Colonel Wixwalter bowed his head upon his hands and groaned aloud.

Rung Lapstone, however, was not to be baffled easily. After one moment of hesitancy, he flung wide the door through which the apparition had vanished, and soon he was dashing down the hall toward the rear of the house. He saw nothing of the "shadow," and flung open

the outer door and peered out at the back of the house.

"Rung Lapstone, beware!"

A voice hissed the words in his ear.

With a sharp cry the king of Quartzville raised his revolver. Before he could use it, however, a stunning blow fell between his eyes, and he went to the floor like a log. For some moments the dazed villain did not essay to rise. Ten thousand stars seemed dancing before his eyes, and he felt as a man might who had fallen from a great height.

"Hades!"

Steps came hurrying along the hall, a light flashed in the fallen man's face, and old Carabel, the housekeeper, bent over her master.

"Ha! Master Rung, you've got a bloody nose. Hel! hel! Who struck ye, master?"

"Durn me if I know."

The mine-owner struggled to his feet, swearing lustily. Without heeding the hag of a housekeeper, he rushed back to the bar-room, where Colonel Wixwalter still leaned against the bar, in a state of mind bordering on frenzy.

"Where is he?—where is that boy?" the white-faced colonel demanded fiercely, as Lapstone entered the bar-room.

"Boy! Hades! it was the devil!" howled Rung Lapstone savagely. "I had a fair shot at the durn little cuss, and it didn't hurt him. He was something more than mortal, I know that."

To this the startled colonel made no reply. His eye caught sight of a white paper pinned to the breast of Rung Lapstone. Quickly Colonel Wixwalter snatched the missive and held it up to the light.

"Harris Maltby, you have not lied. Evadne is in my hands, but she will be protected. Tell Colonel Wixwalter not to worry—I have saved the girl from a worse fate."

KINKFOOT KARL.

"Man, where did you get this?" and Colonel Wixwalter turned fiercely upon the mine-owner, shaking the paper in his face.

"I didn't get it. What is it?"

"Read!"

Colonel Wixwalter thrust the note into the face of Rung Lapstone. He read it, and a triumphant expression sped into his eyes. He was holding a handkerchief to his nose to stay its bleeding, while he faced the colonel.

"I didn't lie to you, John," uttered Rung Lapstone, looking up into his face; "Evadne is in the hands of the outlaw."

"This may be a trick of yours."

"As the man or boy who looked in upon us a moment ago might have been, but you know was not, Colonel Wixwalter. Somebody knocked me down in the hall, and doubtless he it was who pinned this note to my coat. If nothing will convince you, then go it blind, colonel, I won't help you in the least."

"You help me, you who enticed my wife and boys into a death-trap twenty years ago! My God, man! you must think I am made of queer clay to trust the man who proved such a traitor then. No, no, Heaven forbid that I should trust you, Harris Maltby!"

"You are blinded by passion now, John," uttered the plotting mine-owner. "I did not lead your family into the trap you speak of—"

"Stop; you admitted it once."

"You are mistaken. If I did, I must have been blinded by rage. I do remember your saying that Indian Joe told you a strange story of the past, and I said it was true, which it was in part, but only in part. As God hears me, I did not engage in that woeful massacre, nor did I know aught of it until afterward; but when it was over, and I escaped by the circumstance of being absent from the camp as I once told you, I resolved to find and rescue your wife from her captors."

"But you told me that she was slain with the rest," interrupted the colonel quickly.

"Yes, I told you so, but that was not true. I found Marion in Indian hands, and as it chanced, one of these captors—Indian Joe—I knew; had rendered him a great service once, and he permitted me to visit Marion. John, I loved your wife when she was a girl, and but for you I feel sure that I should have won her. Now the temptation was great to induce her to be mine. I acted the villain, and since the poor woman died, have repented it. I do not expect you to forgive me—"

"No, it would be useless to ask it. You are a double-dealing, treacherous hound, Harris. You have told me too many yarns. I cannot trust you," grated Colonel Wixwalter fiercely.

"Just as you like. I was about to propose a plan of action by which Evadne could be restored to you."

"Well, proceed, I will listen."

"Kinkfoot Karl has proven a scourge long enough. A reward is offered for his head. I can raise thirty men, and you a score. With such an army we ought to be able to annihilate the outlaws and rescue your daughter."

"This sounds well," admitted the colonel, "but—"

"Well?"

"We may not be able to find the outlaws. He is cunning and—"

"See here, colonel," interrupted Lapstone.

quickly, "there'll be no trouble about that, none in the least. I can procure a guide who will lead us to Kinkfoot Karl's camp. We can surprise and capture the whole band."

"A guide? Where will you find one?"

"Indian Joe."

"Ah!"

Colonel Wixwalter had never met the Indian, of whom so much had been said, but he was doubly anxious to meet him, since he had been his wife's keeper, and might tell him of many things—perhaps reveal the truth regarding that prairie massacre, and the fate of his children. Perhaps they had not all perished. Turning the subject over in his mind, the old colonel concluded to fall in with the plan of his bitter foe.

"Have you thought it over, Colonel Wixwalter?"

"Yes. It shall be a truce between us for the present, Rung Lapstone."

The mine-owner held out his hand.

"Shake on the strength of renewed friendship, old pard."

But the colonel had not got to that yet. He refused the proffered hand with a shake of his gray head.

"No, it is not a renewal of broken bonds," he said, gravely; "only an alliance for the common good. When my daughter is restored, and the outlaws destroyed, then the old order of things returns, and we are thenceforth enemies; on no other terms will I unite with you."

For an instant a lurid flame seethed in the eyes of Rung Lapstone, but he was a schemer by nature, and smothering his resentment, said:

"As you choose, colonel. I am not particular."

Then the two men talked over the situation, but during all their conversation no further allusion was made to the apparition that had appeared to confront and alarm Rung Lapstone with a terrible warning.

It was agreed that on the following day Lapstone should bring his forces to Cape Horn, where the colonel would join him with what men he could raise, and the combined forces were to seek the trail of Kinkfoot Karl, and follow the daring outlaw to his doom.

The fact that his daughter was in the outlaw's hands steeled the colonel's heart against him, and the past good that he had done was not to be thought of for a moment.

If Colonel Wixwalter was startled at the resemblance of the youth, who had vanished like an apparition when Rung Lapstone fired, to his dead wife, the miner king was doubly terrified.

After the departure of the colonel, he went over to Bob Andrews's cabin, and the twain remained together for a long hour discussing the strange circumstance.

"By Heaven! Bob, there's some magic here that I can't understand, but I will fathom the mystery before many days, or—" but the mine-owner did not finish his sentence as he strode away.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WHAT THE SADDLE BAGS CONTAINED.

"Whoa, Bugs, whoa! Waal, I swow, this 'ere's the wu'st kentry I ever set eyes on, the very wu'st. Jewbillikins! who's a-comin' thar?"

The speaker was Yankee Pete, who, mounted on his mustang, was slowly pursuing his way along a mountain-trail some miles from Quartzville. His last exclamation was caused by seeing a man step out from a clump of bushes with a rifle in his hands, and glance sharply about him. Presently he caught sight of the bell-crowned white hat of Yankee Pete, and then let fall his gun to a level.

"Hold up, stranger," cried the Yankee. "Yeou don't want ter kill me, I hope. I'm a-jest out lookin' for yarbs. Lots of sick folks down ter Cape Horn. Thar was some of the all-firedest tusselin' down yonder last night—"

"Exactly, but that ain't to ther p'int, Yankee. I'm a man o' business. Jest git off'm that hoss."

"Oh, Lordy! be you one of them ugly robbers? Oh! oh! great Jonathan! I wish I was back to Bawston with Aunt Jerusha's folks!"

"Git off, or I'll plug ye," sternly uttered the man. "Ef you ever heard o' Samson Hyte you know he won't stand no foolin'. Git off, Yankee!"

Pete Homespun at once complied, but clung to the mane of the little mustang. He presented a comical appearance as the mountain breeze tossed his long yellow locks about his ears, and toyed with the feathery end of his pointed yellow beard. There was a look of alarm on his thin face as he watched the red face of his interlocutor, evidently expecting to receive a leaden pellet into his vitals.

"Mercy, Mister Robber, I hain't done nothin' ag'in' yeour folks, I swow I hain't. I always admired you, and I'll do anything if you won't take Bugs."

"Bugs?"

"My mustang."

"Exactly. Well, that'll depend," proceeded Samson Hyte with great deliberation. "Ef you tell the truth, I'll let you live and hev yer hoss, but ef you don't—"

What he would do in the latter case Samson did not say, but the look that he gave the Yankee was a terrible one, and Pete Homespun trembled like a leaf under the miner's stern glance.

"Waal, Mr. Samson, heave ahead. Yeou look big enough to b'long to the Bible Samson, who was 'bout as stout a man as the kentry afforded in them times. Yeou are stouter 'n I be, so I've got ter knock under, as ther toughs say. I'm gittin' to be quite a Westerner, yeou see—"

"I see; but hold up a bit; this ain't gittin' at the bottom facts. Wat you in ther mountains fur?"

"Arter yarbs, as I told yeou."

"Hev yer found 'em?"

"Not yet—"

"Waal, needn't mind 'bout explainin'. I'm in ther mountains lookin' fur my pard. Hev yer seen him?"

"Glory! how'd I know him? I—"

"My pard is Graylock, the best young man in Idabo. I've looked fur him putty much sence midnight. I expect he's in the hands o' Kinkfoot Karl, and mebbe you are one of his men. If so, you orter know somethin' 'bout my pard."

"I swow how should I know? Me a beastly outlaw! My gracious! Aunt Jerusha'd turn in her grave ef I'd do sich a wicked thing. No, no, Samson, I'm a M. D. Wat's that? A doctor, a reg'lar Thompsonian yarb and corn sweat doctor. If yeou've got the headache, earache, toothache, backache, colic, rheumatics, sore eyes, bilious spells, cracked heels, the itch, or anything the like, I've got jest ther thing fur yeou—"

"Hold up, pard, that's a leetle too much," thundered Samson Hyte in apparent anger. "The idea of a white man havin' the itch! Condemn yer, man, nobody but niggers an' Yankees hev that. Blast yer old white hat, man, I don't take no stock in yer durn nonsense. I don't b'lieve you've got any sich thing as yarbs in ther saddle-bags. You're a miserable humbug! Let me look inter them sacks and I'll soon diskiver what's what."

Samson Hyte strode forward, but Pete Homespun suddenly removed the saddle-bags and stepped back with a deprecating wave of his hand.

"No, no, you must not touch 'em," cried the Yankee, in such evident alarm as to at once determine Samson Hyte to explore the mysteries of the leather bags.

"Got ter look at 'em, Yankee, so jest hand 'em out," growled the giant miner, reaching out for the leather bags, at the same time dropping the breech of his gun to the ground.

"Back! I won't be trifled with, Samson Hyte!"

Sharp as a bugle-call the voice was flung in Samson Hyte's face. It was not the voice of the Yankee. The miner discovered this, and was now fully determined to explore the saddle-bags, and know all there was to know of the pretended Yankee.

He advanced and attempted to grasp the bags. Bright steel glinted in the eyes of the giant miner.

"Back! I will not be trifled with!"

Samson Hyte reeled back, as the muzzle of a revolver peered into his face, a steel blue eye glancing along the barrel.

"Ho! So that's the game is it?" growled the baffled giant.

Then, for some moments, not a word passed between the two, but the giant miner was revolving a plan of action rapidly in his mind.

"Back, Samson Hyte, and leave me in peace. I have never crossed your path, and I do not mean that you shall interfere with my mission. I am desperate, and determined, and will not be balked."

"Ho! A man with a mission! I see; you're in disguise!"

"You may surmise what you please, only keep your distance," uttered Yankee Pete sharply.

The giant miner's curiosity was now too deeply aroused to permit him to give up the work of satisfying it. In his secret heart he swore to see the inside of the saddle-bags, or die in the attempt. In Samson Hyte the Yankee had a most formidable antagonist.

For some moments the two stood looking into each other's eyes, and then Samson Hyte started as though stung, and lifted his hand.

"My God! look thar!"

The ruse succeeded. Yankee Pete was thrown off his guard temporarily, which was sufficient for the purpose of Samson Hyte. With a quick bound he was upon the slender Yankee. A sharp struggle ensued, and then the revolver was in the giant miner's possession, and Yankee Pete held as one in a vise.

"You can't git away, sonny," growled the giant. "You orter 'a' know'd better'n ter buck ag'in' ther mountain giant. Mebbe you're all right, but 'twon't do no harm ter 'vestigate, which I'll perseed ter do."

The saddle-bags lay on the ground where they had fallen during the struggle, and the white plug hat was crushed down over the nose of poor Homespun.

"Nobody bucks ag'in' Samson Hyte an' comes out ahead, 'member that, pard. Ef you'd let me look inter them leather bags, there wouldn't a-b'en no fuss. Will yer keep quiet while I peek inter them yarb-bolders?"

Yankee Pete seemed utterly crushed.

Moaning and groaning, he crouched in a heap on the ground, his face nearly hidden by the crushed hat, and made no further attempt to resist the will of the giant miner. He seemed to realize that this second Samson would have his way in any event.

Bugs stood eying the proceeding with a comical twinkle of the eye.

Samson Hyte thrust Pete's revolver under his belt, secured his own rifle, and then lifting the saddle-bags from the ground, proceeded to go through them.

The first article he brought forth was a wig of gray hair—almost white, with frizzles and "tag-curls" such as only a woman would wear. "Ah ha!" chuckled the giant miner, "this begins ter look interestin'. We'll look a leetle fuder."

Next he brought out a dark dress and shook out the folds—a woman's complete robe. Diving in again he brought forth still other articles of feminine apparel, and toilet articles too numerous to mention.

"Ho! ho! Wal, I swear, this are's more'n I expected," chuckled the huge young miner in deep delight. "So ye perambulate as a female sometimes: eh, Pete? By gosh! pard, you must be a bad pill. I calkerlate I'd better take yer down ter Cape Horn an' let the curnel take a 'spection o' this trumpery. How'd yer like thet, ole man, say?"

"Them's my Aunt Jerusha's garments," articulated the Yankee at length, lifting his battered hat, and assuming a defiant look. "Poor ole woman willed 'em ter me when she died, and—"

"Nixey, nixey, pard," interrupted the giant miner.

"Sich yarns don't go down no more. Can't play off no Yankee on Samson Hyte ag'in. I mistrusted this afore, my gentle honeysuckle. I've an idee I'll larn more 'fore I git done with yer. A yarb doctor! Judas priest, pard, yer ther slickest liar in Iderho! Come, own up to yer leetle game, an' 'twon't be no wuss fur yer."

It would not surely. The man who was masquerading in Yankee garb seemed to understand the truth of this as he gazed into the kindly face of Samson Hyte.

"I'll make a clean breast of it, Mr. Hyte, and throw myself on your mercy."

"Best thing yer kin do, pard."

The Yankee then opened his lips and told his story.

The stout miner listened with the deepest interest, and when the man had finished, he sprung forward and grasping the Yankee's hand, lifted him from the ground, while a great light seemed to gladden his face, and sparkle from his honest eyes.

"I'm with yer to the end, pard! So it's Rung Lapstone yer fightin'? God bless yer! why didn't yer say so afore! Now I'll help yer to crush ther dastard king of Quartzville, I will, I swear, or my name's not Samson Hyte."

A moist light stood in Pete Homespun's eyes when the giant ceased speaking.

"I have trusted no one so far," said the Yankee. "You will keep my secret, Mr. Hyte?"

"You bet yer big heart I will, pard. I'm ready ter 'polergize fur my words just now. Ye see, I didn't know—"

"Of course not. God knows I need friends. If I have found one in you, Samson Hyte, I am not sorry we met. To-day I was looking for Indian Joe. You have not seen him?"

"No, I don't know ther brute," was Samson's reply.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

STARTLING NEWS.

EARLY the next morning Colonel Wixwalter began the work of organizing his company. His hatred was turned from Rung Lapstone for the time, and he was ready to accept the mine-owner's assistance to wrest his daughter from the hands of the notorious mountain outlaw.

Of late, during the past two nights at least, the colonel had not slept well. His hair and beard seemed to whiten with the trouble that was upon his soul, and his face presented a shrunken, saddened appearance. The loss of his adopted child was not the only trouble that rested on the colonel's mind. Olden memories had been revived, and the sad tragedy which had saddened his early life, came back to him now with renewed force.

The terrible wrong Rung Lapstone, once his bosom friend, had inflicted, rankled like the barbed point of an adder's sting, and every minute now was an hour of suffering to the deeply-wronged man.

News had also reached him of his mine partner's disappearance. Graylock had not been seen since the night of the raid on Cape Horn, and this news did not tend to soften the feeling of enmity that rankled in the colonel's heart for the mine-owner of Quartzville. It must be that the young prospector had been

murdered, in which case Rung Lapstone was certainly guilty. At any rate thus the colonel reasoned.

"Once Evadne is restored to me, I will settle with the treacherous hound who rules at Quartzville."

"Wot's that, pard?"

Unconsciously the colonel had uttered his thoughts aloud, as he stood in front of the Open Hand, inspecting the recruits, who were preparing for the grand movement soon to be inaugurated.

A man with sandy beard and hair confronted the colonel. He had just walked from the bar-room, and his breath smelled strongly of whisky, as he leaned against a post in front of the tavern.

We have met this man before—Luke Slicer, who had more than once killed his man. Now his single eye glowed and gleamed with a sinister fire, and the ugly scar across his cheek and nose seemed ready to burst with the blood that throbbed beneath the surface.

"Wot's that, pard?"

The man repeated his words. He was anxious to quarrel with the colonel—to kill him, as Lapstone had hinted at a large reward for the man who should tell him that the California colonel was dead. It was a foolish move on the part of Luke Slicer, when so many of Colonel Wixwalter's friends were around; but Slicer was well under the influence of liquor, and men in such condition are seldom prudent.

Colonel Wixwalter turned, glanced at the man an instant, then, without deigning to reply, went on with the inspection.

"Look a-here, cunnel, did yer hear me speak?" and Slicer brought his hand down heavily on the shoulder of Colonel Wixwalter. "See hyar, you sardine, I'm a-talkin' jest now."

"Hands off, you low villain," and the colonel pushed the man aside sharply. But Luke Slicer was not to be thus summarily disposed of.

"Look a-here, cunnel, you jest now said you war goin' ter peel Rung Lapstone. Did yer know he was a friend of mine?"

"No, neither did I care."

Again the colonel turned away, but Luke Slicer seemed determined to provoke a quarrel, as the moment the colonel turned, he struck him a blow with his fist that staggered him some feet forward.

This was enough, and Luke Slicer knew it.

As the colonel wheeled, he looked into the muzzle of a six-shooter, held in the hand of the scarred villain who looked after the miner king's interests in Cape Horn.

"No ye don't, cunnel," sneered the villain, his ugly, scarred face looking hideous, as his single eye gleamed along the barrel. "Yer my meat now, yer miserable harpy!"

Colonel Wixwalter's hand fell to his hip, but he was not quick enough. A flash and sharp report came, and the colonel staggered back, his hat flying off in the air.

The low villain would have fired again, had not a hand struck up the weapon, and a heavy blow from the butt of a pistol hurled the would-be murderer to the ground. Over the fallen man stood Yankee Pete, who looked at Colonel Wixwalter in apparent wonder, since the colonel was still on his feet, and seemed none the worse for the murderous shot.

"Hal! Yankee Pete again!"

Picking up his hat, Colonel Wixwalter examined it, and then held it up for inspection. Two round holes through the crown showed where the bullet had passed; and a furrow cut through his abundant hair, attested the fact that the call for Colonel Wixwalter's life had been a close one.

Almost immediately several of the colonel's friends dashed at the fallen man, and began kicking and beating him mercilessly. Doubtless the life would have been beaten out of the villain but for the interference of Colonel Wixwalter, who did not care to see the man killed. Two miners dragged the insensible villain into the saloon, and then the inspection went on as before. The colonel thanked Pete Homespun for his interference, but the latter did not seem to think he had put himself out a great deal in the operation.

Twenty-five men were soon accepted by the colonel. He rejected at least a score; not because of unfitness, but he did not deem it safe for every man to desert Cape Horn at this time, and so expressed himself.

Armed to the teeth, the little band was ready to be led against Kinkfoot Karl, who, only two nights before had saved the town from utter destruction at the hands of the Quartzvillians. This then was their gratitude. It did not seem just right, nor in keeping with the eternal fitness of things; but the voice of Colonel Wixwalter was a power in Cape Horn, and the trouble of the night when Lapstone's ruffians dashed upon the town was all really owing to the work of Kinkfoot Karl, the notorious Mountain Scourge.

Rung Lapstone and his men had labored under a strong misapprehension. The men of Quartzville had been led to believe that Cape Horn harbored the outlaws, and as several of the citizens of the former place had been robbed

of hard-earned dust, and Kinkfoot Karl's outlaws were supposed to be the perpetrators of the thefts, the Quartzville miners were naturally incensed, and consequently made the raid as we have seen.

At any rate this was the way it had been explained to Colonel Wixwalter, and he repeated the story to Cape Horn citizens, and they were ready to join in the hunt for Kinkfoot Karl, and shake hands across the bloody chasm for the time being. It was understood, however, to be only a truce. After the destruction of the mountain outlaws, then the time would come for a settlement of the differences between the rival mining-towns, which would likely be wiped out in blood.

It was now time for the coming of Rung Lapstone and his partisans, with the Indian guide.

The minutes waxed into hours. It was nearly noon, and then came a startling announcement to the band of mounted Vigilantes.

A mounted man came dashing into Cape Horn from the north. His steed was foam-flecked, and the man's hat was gone, his long, matted locks streaming in the wind, as he dashed up to the crowd in front of the Open Hand.

Many of those present recognized the man as Jim Hinstraw, a tough from Quartzville.

"Hold up, pard. What's ther racket?"

Several hands fell to the bridle-rein, as Hinstraw came up. There was blood on his savage face, and he seemed to be deeply excited.

"Outlaws! Lapstone—murder!"

Utterly frightened, the villain seemed for the time entirely unable to give a satisfactory explanation.

"Give 'im a glass o' gin; that'll straighten 'im out."

This suggestion was acted upon, and it did have a wonderful effect upon the mountain tough.

"More; give me 'nother swaller of ther life-elixir, an' I'll feel like a fightin'-cock!" articulated Hinstraw, with a motion of his long arm toward the saloon.

"No, spit out your news first," uttered Colonel Wixwalter, sternly. "We want no whisky yarns here, but the exact truth."

"Wal, thar's been the durn'dest scrimmage up beyond Deadfall Canyon. Our boys won't git hyar ter-day, no they won't. 'Twas a mighty close call fur me. How 'twas? Sart'lnly. Yer see ther boss, that's Rung Lapstone, he'd got a good crowd er ther boys ter come down an' jine teams 'long o' Cape Horn chaps, and we was on ther way when it happened."

"When what happened?" demanded Wixwalter.

"Ther gol-durn'dest outbu't o' deviltry you ever heard on, parson. Sich a yellin', wuss'n a passel o' Injins; and then came ther crash o' guns. Seemed 's though ther mount'in was er-comin' down onter us. What war it? Pard, 'twar ole Kinkfoot Karl and a hull army o' Injins an' white coyotes, and ther war ther all-firedest fight I ever see'd. Our boys was all cut ter pieces, scattered like ther winds o' autumn."

"'Twas fortinit thet I got out wi' a hull skin. I expect you fellers won't git no help from Quartzville this day. It'll be a marcy ef yer don't all lose yer skulps. Now let's see sum more o' that soothin'-sirup."

"See here, man, have you been telling the truth?" uttered the colonel, sharply.

"Truth! See hyar, pard, do yer want ter pick er fuss wi' Jim Hinstraw, ther toughest peeler on ther mount'in?"

"No," simply answered Colonel Wixwalter, "but I would like to know where Kinkfoot Karl is now."

"Wal, yer'll see ther cuss 'fore long. He's comin' this way full chisel, with about a hundred coyotes at his heels. Better git things fixed fur 'im, sence fu't yer know he'll come like a cyclone inter Cape Horn. Pard, I've got ter wet my whistle."

The man slipped from his steaming horse, and pushed his way through the eager throng to the bar of the Open Hand, where he was soon quaffing whisky straight with the gusto of an infant drinking milk.

Colonel Wixwalter was not sure the tough had told a straight story, but he deemed it prudent to prepare for what might come. This might be only a ruse on the part of the treacherous miner king of Quartzville.

The armed men were drawn up across the street to receive the enemy when he came, their horses returned to the stables for the time.

They had not long to wait.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ANOTHER OF THE SIXTEEN.

COLONEL WIXWALTER believed it best to dismount his men for the coming struggle, since in this condition they could shelter themselves behind buildings and fight much more effectually he believed.

Jim Hinstraw seemed to have forgotten the danger under the influence of the gin he was putting down, and he talked loud and boisterously.

In one corner of the saloon sat the disfigured and badly-bruised Luke Slicer. He was becom-

ing more and more wrathful as he thought of the rough treatment he had lately received, and soon after the tough from Quartzville entered, he staggered to his feet and beckoned him to come to him.

"What! Ho! Slicer, you've been in a rum-pus."

Thus did the Quartzville tough greet his old friend.

"I hev," growled Slicer, grasping the arm of Hinstraw. "He set his dogs onto me, and they nigh about killed me; but I mean ter have revenge. I'll kill the colonel, ef it's the last thing I do in this 'ere mundane spear!"

The single eye of Luke Slicer glowed like a living coal while he talked. It was evident that he was in deadly earnest. His beating had pretty nigh sobered the ruffian, and he was now in a condition to act with more caution than formerly.

"Go slow," warned Hinstraw; "this place is full o' ther cunnel's friends."

"Don't I know it? They've got my revolver, but you'll lend me yourn, pard."

"Not jest now. May need it myself, you know."

"Yer knife, then?"

"Pard, don't be a fool!" growled Hinstraw. "This ain't no place fur a racket o' that kind. Bide yer time—bide yer time, that's my motto."

"I'll find a weapon, an' I'll kill the colonel!" hissed the one-eyed villain; and then he reeled away, still muttering to himself in an inaudible manner.

In the mean time, the Vigilantes waited in deep anxiety for the confirmation or rebuttal of Jim Hinstraw's story.

Presently the clatter of horse-hoofs was borne plainly to the ears of the men gathered about the Open Hand. And then hands clutched revolvers, and teeth were stoutly clinched, while the men of Cape Horn waited the onset of the foe.

Nearer and nearer came the sound of hoofs; but it was only the sound of one horseman. Surely this could mean no sudden attack by an overwhelming force. Perhaps a messenger was coming with more news. All eyes were strained toward the upper end of Cape Horn.

Not long, and then a single horseman burst into view.

When he saw the cordon of men drawn up about the tavern, he slackened his speed and came forward at a slow trot. A small figure in Mexican costume, his wide sombrero completely hiding his face for the time.

Forty paces from the Vigilantes the horseman came to a halt, raised his sombrero, and bowed toward the assembled miners.

"St. Jago! it is Kinkfoot Karl!"

As this astounding cry fell from the lips of Colonel Wixwalter, a score of revolvers were leveled at the breast of the daring outlaw.

"Hold!" exclaimed the colonel. "Do not fire. We will make this audacious scoundrel our prisoner!"

"Not to-day, Colonel Wixwalter!" shouted the mountain outlaw. "I am not here to surrender, but I wish a word with the boss man of this goodly company."

Colonel Wixwalter stepped forward and faced Kinkfoot Karl, who greeted him with a smile.

"Colonel, what means this goodly gathering of people?" Kinkfoot Karl demanded rather sharply, the smile fading as quickly as it had come.

"We have organized for the sole purpose of exterminating you and your bandit crew," returned the colonel with emphasis. "I have just learned that you attacked and defeated our Quartzville friends; but you will find sterner stuff to deal with here—"

"Hal! so Rung Lapstone and his myrmidons are your friends? How long has this been true, Colonel Wixwalter?"

"Ever since you attempted to murder me, and stole my daughter from her home."

"Since that never happened, I am at a loss to account for your enmity. Your life has been in my hands many times, colonel, but I have never wished you harm. I did not abduct your child, but two men in the pay of Rung Lapstone did; and she would now be worse than dead had not I rescued her from the hands and power of a monstrous villain."

"Don't you know, Colonel Wixwalter, that the king of Quartzville has schemed against your life, and that he is steeped in crime to his finger-tips? It seems awful to me that an honorable man like you should link your fortunes with a man so vile."

"I care not to discuss such things," cried Wixwalter. "It is my daughter I want, and she is in your hands."

"Yes, I admit that; but under my protection she is safe; in Cape Horn she would not be. Her good and yours, alone induce me to keep the maiden under my protection for a time. When Rung Lapstone is dead, then I will return Evadne to your arms, Colonel Wixwalter, and not sooner."

"What, not sooner?" exclaimed the colonel.

"Not sooner," answered the outlaw.

"You are mighty bold, mighty impudent,

Kinkfoot Karl, to speak thus while you are so completely in my power. A score of revolvers are even now leveled at your heart, and the men who hold them only await my command to fire."

"Why don't you give it?"

Something like a sneer curled the lip of Kinkfoot Karl as he uttered the words.

"It would be too much like murder," answered the colonel. "If you will return my daughter, and leave this region forever, I will disband the Vigilantes, and not attempt to do you any harm; refuse and it shall be war to the knife."

"Colonel Wixwaller, you ask too much," returned the outlaw in a low, grave tone, his black eyes fixed on the ground.

"I am not an outlaw as some people assert. The men I command—and truer men never drew a blade—are following me in the interest of humanity, to exterminate from the earth men who are the vilest of criminals. I am here only to wreak vengeance on one man and his followers. You can bear witness that Cape Horn has not suffered from me or mine. Your real enemy is Rung Lapstone, who hates and would destroy you. This I know. On the night he raided this town, it was his myrmidons, not mine, who attempted to murder you, Colonel Wixwaller. Cape Horn would now be in ashes, and many of her people murdered, but for Kinkfoot Karl and his outlaws as you term them—"

"Stop. You have said enough," interrupted the Californian. "I know you did Cape Horn a good turn the other night, and I am willing to reciprocate. Return my daughter, and I will disband the Vigilantes without insisting on your flight from Idaho."

"I cannot do it—not just yet."

"You must, you shall," asserted the colonel with a look of determination on his face. At the same time he had a hand on the outlaw's bridle-rein.

"Strong words, old man. I never yet was driven to do anything. Men who undertake to drive Kinkfoot Karl generally find the contract too great for their capabilities."

Colonel Wixwaller turned as if to address the Vigilantes, but Kinkfoot Karl stopped him.

"Not a word to your pals just yet, old man. Back yonder my men await my return. Do you think I am fool enough to give myself into your hands? I am not quite bereft of sense, colonel; no, not quite. I came here for the purpose of seeing you, and explaining the situation—"

"I will not listen further. I must have my daughter," the colonel interrupted. "You may consider yourself my prisoner, Kinkfoot Karl. I propose to hold you as a hostage, until my child is restored."

"And your young pard, Graylock, perhaps," sneered the outlaw.

"Hal! he is in your hands too?"

"Yes, and will there remain for a time."

As the Mountain Scourge thus spoke, he threw open his cloak, revealing a belt glittering with weapons.

"Men of Cape Horn, seize this outlaw!"

Colonel Wixwaller turned toward his men, to see that which made him recoil in alarm. Between him and his men stood Luke Slicer, and at this instant he covered the form of Colonel Wixwaller with a cocked revolver.

"Move an arm and I'll plug yer," hissed the ruffian, who stood only a few paces distant, and entirely unsuspected by the Vigilantes twenty yards away. In fact they supposed him one of their own band, and knew not that he meditated a murderous assault upon the life of Colonel Wixwaller.

The one-eyed scoundrel had counted the chances, and had taken his life into his own hands in order to revenge himself upon the colonel, and win approval and gold from Rung Lapstone at the same time. Twenty feet from where the colonel stood was his horse, hitched to a post near the corner of the Open Hand tavern.

When the colonel fell, it was the assassin's intention to spring to this horse and make his escape. Thus had he planned, and a glow of conscious triumph shot from the single eye, as he covered Colonel Wixwaller with a deadly six-shooter.

Fortunate it was for the colonel that the villain, Slicer, had but one eye. He could not watch two men at the same time.

The order that fell from the lips of Colonel Wixwaller came only in a whisper, being cut short by the startling sight that met his gaze.

"Colonel, I swore I'd kill ye, and now I'm goin' ter do it!" hissed the scarred villain, as his finger slipped to its place against the trigger. Behind the colonel a hand moved with the swiftness of lightning.

A glittering blade shot through the air, just as the finger of the assassin pressed the trigger. The revolver cracked, but it was an unsteady hand that discharged it, and the bullet sped wide of its mark.

A cry of horror fell from the lips of the startled colonel.

On the ground lay Luke Slicer, seemingly pinned to the ground by a bowie blade. His

skull had been cleft by the broad blade, and life was extinct by the time the horrified miners reached the fallen man's side.

While the colonel stood in dumb horror, the clatter of flying hoofs fell on his ear. Whirling quickly he saw Kinkfoot Karl riding away. He was looking back, his hat off, his long hair streaming in the wind, as he executed a mocking bow to the astonished witnesses of his expert knife-throwing. But Colonel Wixwaller was unable to utter a word just then.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE HALF-BREED AND THE TOUGH.

DUMB with amazement, Colonel Wixwaller stood, glaring after the fleeing outlaw.

He realized that Kinkfoot Karl had saved his life, and he could not then order a pursuit. Several shots were fired after the fleeing man, but they were ineffectual ones, and soon the outlaw disappeared from view.

Jim Hinstraw came out and gazed at the dead villain, and even his whisky-flushed face paled. Too well did he know the meaning of the cleft brain of his late friend. That huge bowie was a sign that the avenger of Little Gaudy did not sleep, nor had he rested from the trail of vengeance.

"'Nother o' ther sixteen gone," muttered, in a ghostly whisper, the burly Quartzville miner. "Golamighty! 'tain't safe round these diggin's I 'low. Perdition clinch ther cuss as killed my pard."

"Your pard?"

One of the miners turned fiercely upon Hinstraw, for Colonel Wixwaller had told the facts regarding the late attempt on his life, and all the indignation of the miners was turned from Kinkfoot Karl against the miserable wretch who lay bleeding on the stony ground before them.

"My pard. Why not?" and Jim Hinstraw grasped the butt of his revolver, and glared upon the speaker menacingly.

But a dozen weapons came forth, and fierce scowls were bent upon the lone miner from Quartzville. He realized that to draw a weapon now would doom him to instant death.

"He war my pard," again asserted Jim Hinstraw sullenly, but not drawing his revolver. "Ef you fellers stick up fur ther cuss thet killed him, ye'r jest as bad's ther durn outlaw what killed him. Them's my sentiments an' I don't give a durn who knows it."

"Mebbe you will, now," growled a voice.

"Jest you travel, or mebbe yer won't be able, Jim."

"Durn cowardly fur a hull settlement ter pitch onter one man," growled Jim Hinstraw. Nevertheless he deemed it prudent to get out of Cape Horn at an early moment.

In a little time he might have been seen riding along the trail leading to Quartzville.

"Pesky bad, pesky bad," muttered the tough, as he rode along with his revolver clinched in his hand, ready for instant use. He wore an old white hat given him by one of the men of Cape Horn, so he did not return homeward with a bare poll. "Great Judas! thar's been a lot of poor devils gone under sence we left Sure Deal ter git clear o' ther pistol an' ther bowie o' ther venger. Kinkfoot Karl must 'a' thought a heap o' Little Gaudy ter foller ther trail so like er hound. Gad zounds! why can't this yere durn critter peg out? I've shot twice at the leetle devil, but he caught ther bullets in his teeth an' spit 'em back at me. Thar's somethin' supernat'ral 'bout the mountain coyote thet beats me all holler."

"I 'gin ter feel all-fired skittish. Better a durn sight be in Californy than hyar, yes, a durn sight—"

Spang!

The report of a rifle woke the echoes of the mountain passes, and a bullet whistled within an inch of the tough's head.

"Great Judas!"

Then he planted his heels into the side of the animal he bestrode, and urged him forward at a terrific pace.

The tough had taken the longer road to Quartzville, since it was in the vicinity of Dead-fall Canyon that the outlaws had attacked and routed Rung Lapstone's partisans only a few hours before. Already Hinstraw had passed far beyond the neighborhood of the canyon, and was congratulating himself on being out of danger, when the crack of the rifle warned him of the proximity of an enemy.

On down the mountain trail sped the tough like the wind, a terrible fear whelming his soul at thought of a deadly enemy on his path. On and on, until the horse caught his feet against a stone and stumbled to his knees, thus bringing him to a sudden halt. This move on the part of the horse was an unexpected one, and consequently the man on his back was in no way prepared for the catastrophe, hence the result—Jim Hinstraw was flung over the animal's head to the ground.

Somewhat bruised, but not badly injured, the tough scrambled to his feet; the horse came to his feet about the same time, but Hinstraw was not permitted to remount just then.

"Hold on, dar," cried a loud voice, which

caused the Quartzville tough to face about and raise his revolver.

"No, me want no fight," said the tall, thin personage who confronted the tough.

"By Judas! hain't you the Injun I see'd in town onc't, palaverin' wi' Rung Lapstun?" questioned the miner, in a relieved tone, when he saw that the man before him was a half-breed well advanced in years.

"Think mebbe," answered the half-breed. "You goin' to Quartzville?"

"Wal, ef a slug don't git the upper hand, from some sneakin' coyote, I calkerlate I'll land thar afore night," answered Jim, grimly. "Somebody jest let go at me back yender."

"I heard the gun," said Jim's interlocutor, "but guess 'twas only a man shootin' at a mark. My name's Joe Pewomo, and I want send word to white boss in Quartzville."

"Eggsactly."

"You will see him to-night?"

"Ef I hold my bigness I will, bet yer sweet life on that, my handsome red-skin."

"Jest tell him Injun Joe wants to see him, right off quick, will you?"

The thin old half-breed's eyes snapped, and a dark frown mounted his brows as he spoke.

"I'll tell 'im, but he won't come."

"Me t'ink he will. Tell him Injun Joe sent for him, he won't stay 'way. I wait for him right here. Been lookin' for him long time, but he no come. He tell one, two, t'ree lies. Pewomo no like dat; guess he not stand it much longer neither."

"What will you do if he don't come?"

"Me kuow—he know, and he come right quick, when he hear me want him bad; got some news for him," and the half-breed's eyes snapped like bits of flame while he talked.

"All right, my yaller pard. Anythin' more?"

"No."

Indian Joe turned and suddenly vanished in the bushes that lined the mountain trail. Hinstraw mounted and was once more pursuing his way toward Quartzville, which place he reached without more adventure.

It was late in the day, but a crowd of miners was in front of Miner's Paradise, when the stout tough rode up. It was not an enthusiastic crowd, however. A somber gloom seemed to rest on the face of each man present. Scarcely a word was said to Jim Hinstraw, as he dismounted, and pushed his way through the gathering to the saloon.

"Whar's Rung Lapstone?" demanded the tough of the bartender bluntly.

"In yonder, him an' Bob Andrews," and the man addressed pointed to the door leading to the mine-owner's office. The tough at once tried the door, and found it locked.

"You won't get in thar jest now, Jim," said the man of drinks. "He's madder'n a wet hen over the bad deal the boys got this mornin'."

"Durn it, I must see 'im. Got 'portant news. Hey! open up, cap'n. Let me in; got the gold-durn'dest nest o' news yer ever heerd."

Almost immediately, to the astonishment of the whisky-seller, the door was opened and Jim Hinstraw admitted to the presence of the miner king and his favorite pard. For half an hour the tough remained closeted with the mine-owner, at the end of which time the door opened, and Hinstraw came out, and called for whisky. When the door closed again Rung Lapstone turned a scowling, troubled face to Bob Andrews.

"You see how it is, Bob, matters have come to a deuced bad pass. Kinkfoot Karl puts in his work almost every day now. By the bowie or the bullet the executioners of Little Gaudy are going down in death. How many are there left? Mighty few. Our turn will soon come. I am free to confess, pard, that I am getting nervous."

"It's enough to make anybody nervous," answered Bob Andrews. "Why in Satan can't this man, Kinkfoot Karl, be destroyed? It seems to me durned strange—"

"Strange!" ejaculated the mine-owner quickly, almost savagely, "it's supernatural! I'm puzzled beyond measure. It seems to be that Kinkfoot Karl wields the knife the most of the time; but I am not sure that all the men who have fallen under the blade were slain by that mountain outlaw."

"Well?" and Bob Andrews looked up with sober questioning into the face of his employer.

"Little Gaudy!"

A strange pallor crept into the mine-owner's face as he mentioned the name of the dead.

"Well?" again questioned Bob Andrews, solemnly.

"Is he dead?—we have both seen his face since we came to Quartzville several times. Twice have I put a bullet into the thing without effect. I haven't forgotten that the little wretch swore to haunt me after he was dead, and who knows? it may be true that dead folks do come back sometimes."

"No, no, it cannot be," and Andrews shook his head.

"Then Little Gaudy still lives!"

"Impossible! I helped put the boy under the s'ile, pard, and I know he baint resurrected," returned Bob. "I'll take my oath thet he warn't alive when we planted 'im."

"So would I; but I think some of making a pilgrimage to Sure Deal all the same."

"Why?"

"To look into that lone grave under the mountain shadows of California. I want to be satisfied—"

"My God! Rung, don't you go." Bob came to his feet with a white horror stealing into his face. "Ef you should go there, you'd sure go under; like enough a bullet or a knife would find your heart when you was standing over the grave! It's awful! You're safest here. We kin fix the avenger here. If we kill two men we are safe, and the ghost of a dead man won't haunt us no more."

"Two men?"

"Kinkfoot Karl and Pete Homespun."

"Ha! so you suspect that infernal Yankee?" cried Lapstone quickly, a sudden fire flaming in his eyes.

"Suspect him! I know that ef 'twarn't fur him, Colonel Wixwalter wouldn't be alive to-day. He stepped atween the lads and the colonel when they would 'a' shot him. He's now in Cape Horn, hobnobbin' with Wixwalter. It would be a good plan to put him under about the fust thing that's done."

"I believe you," cried Lapstone. "I must see this Indian, and settle with him, and then we will look after this Yankee and the colonel."

CHAPTER XXXI.

COLONEL WIXWALTER'S STARTLING EXPERIENCE.

AFTER the scenes of the morning and afternoon, Colonel Wixwalter felt unable to proceed against Kinkfoot Karl.

He had the assurance, from the man who had saved his life, that Evadne was safe and would not be harmed. At first this had been of little comfort to the Californian, but when he thought of Kinkfoot Karl's brave work in his behalf on more than one occasion, he realized that he owed much to the outlaw.

Since the rout of the party from Quartzville, the outlaws would not be frightened nor easily conquered, and on the whole the colonel believed it best to adjourn the movement in search of the outlaws until a more convenient season.

"Boys," he said, addressing his friends, "we will adjourn this meeting for the day, and see to burying this man, and looking after other important interests. To-morrow we will move against Kinkfoot Karl if nothing happens."

Then he returned to his lonely home.

An hour later, while he sat brooding over his troubles, and debating in mind what was the best course to pursue under the circumstances, a mounted man dashed up to the house.

Colonel Wixwalter, who sat in the open door, looked up to spring from his seat with a cry of surprise.

Again had the chief of the mountain robbers dared meet him face to face. With a bow and smile, Kinkfoot Karl lifted his sombrero and said:

"Colonel Wixwalter, I am your friend, whether you believe it or not. You have been doing your best to injure me of late, even joining with the man who is your deadly enemy to do so; but I can forgive you this, since you believed me the abductor of your child. Such a deed is bad enough, but you forget the fact that Rung Lapstone is a murderer and outlaw in the truest nature of the term, while I am only seeking to avenge the murder of my friend."

"Who was this friend—"

"Little Gaudy he was called, and Rung Lapstone foully murdered him one night, months ago, at Sure Deal. I then swore to have the life of every man who participated in the murder. If you wish to know how well that oath has been kept, ask Rung Lapstone. The man who fell to-day, under the knife of Kinkfoot Karl, was one of the doomed sixteen—but I am not here now to talk of these things. I come to request that you disband the Vigilantes and await developments."

"Return me my child and your request shall be granted," said the colonel.

"I cannot do that."

"Then, in spite of the good you have done, we must remain enemies," uttered Colonel Wixwalter sternly. "I shall move against you to-morrow, perhaps sooner, and on your head be the blood that must flow."

"Such a course would only prove your downfall, colonel. It would not be safe for your daughter here—"

"Let me judge of that," the colonel interrupted, sharply. "I prefer to have my daughter with me; she would find surer protection than in the camp of mountain bandits. It must be war to the knife, Kinkfoot Karl—"

"Stop," and the outlaw interrupted Colonel Wixwalter with a low yet fierce word. "This may alter your opinion a bit. If not, let the war come, and the blood be upon your head."

As the outlaw spoke, he tossed a letter to the hand of the Californian—a sealed note, with the colonel's name neatly inscribed in pencil thereon.

He at once recognized the chirography, and with nervous eagerness tore it open.

"DEAR FATHER:—Do not alarm yourself on my account. I am well, and in good hands. Kinkfoot

Karl has persuaded me that it is best for me to remain in the mountains for a time. For my sake do not attempt to harm the brave Karl, who, I assure you, is a gentleman and our friend. Mr. Graylock is here, but is well treated, and will remain for a short time only. I believe we have all been deceived regarding the nature and doings of Kinkfoot Karl. Rest easy on my account, but beware of Rung Lapstone, the miner king of Quartzville. Your daughter

EVADNE."

The black eyes of the Mountain Scourge watched the face of the Californian closely while he perused the note.

"Well?" as Colonel Wixwalter looked up from the reading.

"It must be as she says."

"I admire your good sense, colonel," uttered Kinkfoot Karl with a satisfied smile. "You do not doubt the authenticity of that letter?"

"Not in the least."

"Well, is it peace between us then, Colonel Wixwalter?"

"For the present, yes."

Kinkfoot Karl leaned from the saddle with extended hand. The colonel moved forward and grasped it with a hearty pressure.

"I have one favor to ask of you, Kinkfoot."

"Well?"

"That you permit me to visit Evadne."

"I am sorry, colonel, but just now I must refuse to permit it. I have my reasons, and they are good ones, but I will not give them now. Rest quietly for a few days; a strange denouement is at hand."

Then the mountain outlaw wheeled his horse and galloped away. Scarcely had he disappeared when the sharp crack of a rifle broke on the air. Colonel Wixwalter, who was standing in the door, started at the sound of the rifle. He watched the thicket with no little anxiety.

The sharp clang of hoofs fell on his ear, and an instant later a riderless horse dashed into the opening, and swept past the house. It was Kinkfoot Karl's animal and there were flecks of blood on saddle and mane.

The colonel shuddered.

What deed of blood had been perpetrated? The colonel's interest in the fate of the mountain outlaw was intensified by the startling thought that the brave young man had been foully murdered. Colonel Wixwalter was a square man, and did not believe in foul play, not even when dealing with an enemy.

The riderless horse had passed from view now, and Colonel Wixwalter sprung to his room, and buckled on a belt, from which depended a brace of revolvers; then he hurried from the house, and walked rapidly toward the spot from whence the report of a fire-arm had come. Pushing his way forward, Colonel Wixwalter soon stood in a wild spot where, on one hand the mountain towered high, while on the other a gorge, lined with bushes and stunted trees, alone met his vision; and right here, on the narrow trail was a pool of blood. Along the edge of the path for some distance were spatters of gore, and then they disappeared on the very edge of a deep, dark gulch.

Here the body of the murdered outlaw had been flung down, down into the thicket below. Colonel Wixwalter peered over into the dark abyss, and then drew back with a shudder.

"Poor fellow!" muttered the colonel; "he met his fate when he little expected it," and then a shudder swept the frame of the stalwart Californian.

Crack!

High up the rugged mountain-side echoed the short spang of a rifle, and a bullet swept so near the brow of Colonel Wixwalter as to stir the lock of hair that hung over his temple. It was a shot that surprised more than it startled the Californian. The assassin of Kinkfoot Karl had fired at his life also.

Instantly the colonel sought the shelter of a huge rock near, and with a cocked revolver in hand, awaited developments.

For many minutes the colonel watched and waited, but no one appeared. He realized that it would not be safe to step out upon the trail, in full view of the assassin again, since he might make a better shot next time; but when half an hour had passed Colonel Wixwalter resolved to risk it.

"Drap that weepin', pard, or I'll bore yer!"

The colonel threw up his head with a start. Directly above him, on a jutting crag, stood a huge dwarfish figure—dwarfish as far as height was concerned, but of immense proportions otherwise; and his finger clutched a heavy buffalo rifle in his hand, which was now leveled at the breast of the Californian.

"Ho! ho! pard, you didn't expect me? No, but I'm, hyar all the same. Mebbe you don't know me, my Californy grizzly?"

"No," admitted the colonel.

"I'm Big Dan from Sure Deal. Ever hear o' the place?"

"I have heard the name."

"Eggactly. Ho! ho! I was with my pard, Rung Lapstun', nigh two year ago, when a little cub they called Little Gaudy, the dandy o' ther mines went under. Ho! ho! but we peeled ther leetle cuss till he bellered like a sick calf. Don't keer ter hear 'bout it, eh? Makes no difference, you'll hear me 'coz I want yer ter know why Big Dan sends yer ter kingdom come when

yer's a parfuct stranger. I'm a money-makin' man, I be, and thar's money in sendin' Cunnel Wixwalter t'other side the river. Why? 'Coz my pard, Rung, wants ye thar."

"Jest a word regardin' a chap as calls hisself Kinkfoot Karl, though Lord knows he ain't that critter, fer I see'd a man as saw the identicle Kinkfoot Karl hung, down in Colorado nigh a year ago, by a party o' lynchers. But ter bizness. I've jest put the avenger o' Leetle Gaudy under fur good, I reckon. Plunked a ounce o' lead inter his head, an' he's down in yender gulch deader'n a door-nail this minnit. Kinkfoot Karl won't bother Rung Lapstun' nor me any more. Now, my gentle Californy diamond, you'll go an' jine ther leetle cuss who pertended he was Kinkfoot Karl an' wasn't."

The huge dwarf paused in his explanation, and seemed about to pull the trigger of his huge breech-loader.

"Hold! Would you murder a man?" cried the colonel.

"Ho! ho! Want ter beg fer yer life, eh?"

"No!"

Colonel Wixwalter uttered the word fiercely. To be murdered in cold blood was not to his liking, and he resolved to make one desperate effort for life.

His muscles were strained for a mighty leap, when a startling thing occurred.

The huge dwarf uttered a low gasp, a rifle cracked, and the next instant Big Dan rolled like a ball down the steep to the feet of the astounded colonel. A bullet whistled over the Californian's head, which proved that it was the assassin's gun that had been fired.

Big Dan lay at the colonel's feet with a bowie-blade through his heart!

CHAPTER XXXII.

MOTHER ARMORE.

"G'LONG, Bugs! Git aout o' this— Hallo!"

Colonel Wixwalter was aroused from his contemplation of the dead by the sudden appearance of Yankee Pete and his mustang, who came slowly down the mountain trail upon him.

"Eh! Good Jerusha! what's this?"

Yankee Pete stared at the transfixed body of the huge dwarf, and then at Colonel Wixwalter. He evinced considerable excitement, and his hand trembled as he stroked his pointed beard. Evidently the sight of blood moved him strangely to-day.

Colonel Wixwalter was not long in explaining how the tragedy had occurred.

"This man I am sure murdered Kinkfoot Karl," said Colonel Wixwalter, in conclusion. But Pete Homespun shook his head and refused to believe. Pointing at the handle of the bowie, that stood above the breast of the dead dwarf, he said:

"There's only one hand in the Northwest kin throw a knife like that, cunnel. You kin bet all ther apple-sass in Idaho thet Kinkfoot Karl still lives."

"That wouldn't be much," smiled the Californian, grimly. "I cannot believe, however, that Kinkfoot Karl is not dead. This man," pointing to the body of Big Dan, "said he killed him, and there's blood on the trail. I heard the crack of a rifle, and Karl's horse went past my house without a rider. Putting these things together, I conclude that the Mountain Scourge is dead."

"Pray Heaven, it may not be so!" uttered the Yankee, fervently.

Colonel Wixwalter regarded the speaker sharply.

Perhaps a suspicion of the truth dawned upon the brain of the colonel, but he made no remark upon it then.

With some difficulty the Californian searched the gulch below the mountain trail, fully believing he would find the bleeding corpse of Kinkfoot Karl. He was disappointed in his search, however; and after a half-hour given to carefully exploring the gulch, he returned to the trail.

Placing the body of the dead tough across the back of Bugs, the two men conveyed it to Cape Horn, where the wonderful story of the man's death was told to interested and startled listeners.

Late in the evening Colonel Wixwalter and the Yankee returned to the home of the Californian.

"I hain't hed no rest lately," said the Yankee, as he sat with the gloomy-browed colonel in the latter's room, on the evening after the mysterious disappearance of Kinkfoot Karl. "I made up my mind to change my boardin'-house."

The colonel sat with bowed head and made no reply, and the Yankee went on:

"Seein' you was lonely 'thout Evadne, I thought mebbe you'd let me board long of yeou a spell. No harm done, nohow, ef yeou don't agree to it. Bugs can git 'nough ter eat on ther mount'in."

"You can stay, of course," answered the colonel.

After that Wixwalter read Evadne's letter once more, and then again fell into gloomy reflection. His enmity for Rung Lapstone was

on the increase, and he did not believe he would be able to keep his hands off the villain long.

The Yankee was duly installed in the colonel's ranch, where he was to remain during his pleasure.

On the following day Colonel Wixwaller went to Cape Horn, and left word at the Open Hand for the miners to resume work for the present, as he did not deem it advisable to attempt the destruction of Kinkfoot Karl's band just now. The miners of Cape Horn had laid by a terrible grudge which would one day break out against the toughs of Quartzville; but as Colonel Wixwaller was averse to any hostile movement until his daughter was found, the miners bowed to his wishes in the matter, and quiet once more reigned among the silver hills.

Two nights later, late in the evening, as Colonel Wixwaller and Yankee Pete sat in the former's room, discussing the mysterious disappearance of Kinkfoot Karl, a slight sound fell on their ears. Yankee Pete had won the friendship of the colonel, and now the two consulted often, although the simple-minded Yankee seemed never able to grasp weighty subjects, or to think deeply. He was content when enlarging upon the virtues of his "yarbs" and "intments," or the wonderful virtues of "sassyfras pills."

To-night, however, more serious subjects were under discussion, when an interruption came as we have seen.

The curtain was down so that no one could peer into the room from without, and the front and back doors of the house were securely bolted.

Both men listened intently. Soon something of a startling nature occurred. A hand lifted the latch cautiously, and tried the front door. As it did not yield the door was shaken gently.

"Who's comin' now?" whispered the startled Yankee.

Colonel Wixwaller was on his feet instantly, and seizing a belt from the wall, buckled it about his waist. From this depended a brace of revolvers.

"Halloo ther ranch!"

A person outside had ventured to hail, and in spite of the disguised voice, the colonel believed it was the chief of Quartzville who spoke.

The colonel stepped to the outer door, with the Yankee at his heels. With a revolver clutched in hand he asked:

"Who is there? What is wanted?"

"We want ter speak to yer a minnit, cunnel. Open the door, please."

But Colonel Wixwaller was not ready to do this. The man might have a dozen at his back, and it was not pleasant to fall, as many another had, by the hand of an assassin.

"That won't go down, Mr. Lapstone," replied the colonel. "You are here for some mischief. I am armed, and will not be taken, so go your ways if you would preserve your carcass from a grist of lead."

A muttered oath was heard without.

"I'll tell you the truth, colonel," said Rung Lapstone in his natural voice, seeing that his disguise had been penetrated by the sharp-eared colonel. "We are not here to make trouble for you, but seek a man calling himself Yankee Pete. He's an old desperado whom the Quartzville miners want for a crime committed long ago. We know the rascal is here, and shall not return without him."

"Possibly you are mistaken—"

At this moment Yankee Pete plucked at Colonel Wixwaller's arm. The latter bent his head, while in rapid tones Pete Homespun whispered strange things in his ear.

"Now, if they want me we can defeat them in this way," concluded the Yankee, and then he disappeared in an adjoining room.

"I am not mistaken. Open up before I order my men to fire the house," said Rung Lapstone, in an angry voice.

"See here, you villain, if you make too much noise you'll rouse Cape Horn. Yankee Pete isn't here."

"We know better."

"No one but my housekeeper is in the house besides myself, and you have nearly frightened her out of her wits. Go away and leave us in peace."

For some time silence reigned without. At the end of a few minutes, a thunderous pounding came on the door.

"Open, Colonel Wixwaller, or it'll be worse for you. All we seek is Pete Homespun. Give up the Yankee, and you shall not be harmed. I have a dozen men with me, and mean business!"

"Yankee Pete isn't here."

"Open, and we will judge for ourselves!"

"I have a mind to," thought the colonel. He was a brave man, and believed himself able to cope with half a dozen at least, in his own house. He knew that the men without could force their way in if they chose, and he concluded to save them the trouble.

"Yankee Pete is not here," said the colonel; "but as you will not take my word for it, I will permit you to enter if you promise to do no damage to myself or property."

Rung Lapstone made the desired promise, and then Colonel Wixwaller shoved the bolt

and permitted the mine-owner and two men to enter. He then closed and bolted the door after them.

"You won't find the Yankee here," said the colonel. "He went away this afternoon."

Lapstone shoved the slide of a dark-lantern, and looked about sharply.

"We will search the house anyhow."

"As you please."

"The Yankee's no Yankee at all, but an old offender," said Lapstone. "We've just made the discovery, and there's a big reward offered. Come, show us over the house, colonel."

Distrusting the mine-owner, Colonel Wixwaller refused to place himself at the mercy of his enemy by walking in advance. Instead, he requested Lapstone to take the lead with his two men.

The mine-owner consented to this, and Colonel Wixwaller brought up the rear, clutching in each hand a cocked revolver ready for use in case of treachery.

The house was thoroughly searched save one room.

"That is Mother Armore's room," said the colonel. "No use looking there."

"Just the room we must see the inside of," growled Rung Lapstone, lifting the latch.

An instant more the mine-owner pushed into the room, and flashed his light through the apartment. A low, startled cry filled the little chamber.

Shrinking to the far corner of the room, clad in loose wrapper, with wild, frightened eyes, pallid face and disheveled gray hair, was a slender old woman, who looked the picture of abject terror.

"Mother Armore; you have frightened her, you see!" cried Colonel Wixwaller. "My dear madam, calm yourself; these gentlemen will not harm you. They seek the Yankee who left here this afternoon. Gentlemen, I think you are satisfied."

Rung Lapstone eyed the frightened woman sharply, then turned to the bed. He peered under this, and struck the tick with his revolver. After this, with a growl of disappointment, he passed from the room.

Ten minutes later the mine-owner and his men left the house, and quiet reigned once more over the colonel's ranch. Rung Lapstone was sorely disappointed, and swore roundly as he departed.

Shortly after the departure of the men from Quartzville, Colonel Wixwaller hastened to the room occupied by Mrs. Armore. His face was white, and a mystified look filled his eyes as he laid his hand on the latch.

"It was a strange likeness," he muttered, as he tried the door.

It refused to yield, however, and the colonel turned away with an inward groan.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"YOUR TURN NEXT."

RUNG LAPSTONE'S night visit to Colonel Wixwaller's house had resulted in failure. Yankee Pete was yet free, and the colonel still lived as a menace to his future success and happiness.

When Lapstone went on his night mission to the colonel's home, he had thought of killing the colonel, but he found that individual thoroughly on his guard, and so permitted him to live a little longer. It might be as well. Before the colonel died he must execute a will leaving everything to his adopted daughter Evadne.

Perhaps this had already been done, but if so, Rung Lapstone was not aware of the fact. Should Colonel Wixwaller die without making a will, other heirs might step in and claim the estate of the deceased.

"My soul! it was lucky I thought of this," uttered Rung Lapstone himself one day. "I might have killed the colonel, married Evadne, and lost the fortune. A narrow escape indeed, I'm glad, now, the boys did not succeed when they went for the colonel that night when Evadne was seized. Confound it! I wonder what has become of the girl. It must be that she and Graylock are in the hands of Kinkfoot Karl."

The meditations of the mine-owner were interrupted by the sudden appearance of Jim Hinstraw. He had come to tell of the death of Big Dan.

"His heart war split by a bowie, pard; and the 'venger o' Little Gaudy did it. I heered all about it up ter Cape Horn, whar they planted ther big dwarf. Cunnel Wixwaller an' Yankee Pete brung ther carcass ter ther Horn. Ther's on'y three o' ther boys left now; thirteen gone, out o' ther jolly lads thet onc't flourished at Sure Deal."

Then Long Jim Hinstraw swaggered to the bar and 'lowed he'd drink at Rung Lapstone's expense.

"Yes, give him the liquor," said the mine-owner in answer to the nod from the bar-keeper.

"So Big Dan has fallen a victim to the bowie of Kinkfoot Karl. Hades! how long is this to last? It can't go on much longer, since there are only three left of the original sixteen who were in at the death of the little dandy of Sure Deal. As Bob Andrews says, it was a sorry day when we put the little cuss under. But

something had to be done to silence the suspicions of the Sure Deal miners. I was safe after he died, safe from my pard; but, good God! not safe from the avenger of blood—Kinkfoot Karl! Who is he, that he should prove such a friend to the little scamp I sent to kingdom come under the blasted tree at Sure Deal?

"I am growing more nervous as the days pass. One by one the old lot are going down before his knife. Kinkfoot Karl and Samson Hyte are two distinct individuals, I am sure of that now. But who is this mountain outlaw? And who is that infernal Yankee?—not what he seems I can swear to that; and Little Gaudy! I have seen his face more than once, and shot him full of holes, yet the ghost still lives and walks. What does it mean? Can the dead haunt people this way? or is Little Gaudy still living? No, no, it cannot be; and yet I know the face. By Heaven! this mystery must be solved at once. If I could only secure that girl, I'd leave Quartzville, and go back to California and in 'Trisco revel in love and gold."

Back and forth at the far side of the room paced the miner king, with his bearded chin upon his breast, his hands clinched, a look of somber uneasiness on his face.

He was nervous over the situation.

It seemed to him that his own merited doom could not be far away, and a deep dread rested on the villain's soul, and oppressed him with a mortal terror.

Under the influence of the nameless horror that was growing upon his soul, the king of Quartzville went to the bar and swallowed copious draughts of brandy. He was not in a hilarious mood to-day. The gloom that sat upon his brow but revealed the fear that was growing into a terrible dread in his heart.

Bob Andrews came in while the miner king was drawing consolation out of a black bottle on the bar. The former was pale, and looked far from at ease.

"Drink, Bob, and then I have something to tell you."

For a wonder, the little man refused the proffered drink. He took a cigar, however, and with the miner king repaired to the office, where they remained for some hours.

Late in the day Rung Lapstone repaired to the cabin of Andrews.

As he approached, he saw a white object pinned to the door. A near approach showed it to be a notice written in a coarse hand.

"TO THE MINER KING OF QUARTZVILLE:—"

"This is to notify you that you have jest 24 hours to leave the kentry. Ef you stay arter that time you'll pass in yer checks."

"BY ORDER VIGILANTES COMMITTEE."

"Hades!" growled Rung Lapstone. "What in Satan is this for?"

A step sounded near, and the next moment Bob Andrews appeared, and glared at the notice on his own door.

"Did you see it before, Bob?"

"No."

"Who could have put it here? in open day, too, and not be seen? By the powers of mud, Bob, somebody's got to answer for this. Vigilantes Committee indeed!"

"I don't understand it," muttered Bob Andrews, with frowning brows; "but I reckon I can guess whose work this is."

"Well?"

"Men from Cape Horn. P'raps Samson Hyte had something to do with it. You know he's our enemy, and imagines that we know where his pard an' Miss Wixwaller are. It must be his work."

"And is meant to frighten me," grated the mine-owner.

"Surely no man who meant business would give warning beforehand. Bother such durn nonsense!"

With the words Rung Lapstone tore the paper from the door, flung it to earth and ground it under his heel contemptuously. After this the two villains entered the cabin. Night-shadows were falling, and it was quite dark in the miner's house.

"Wait a minnit, pard, and I'll strike a light."

Thus spoke Bob Andrews. Lapstone heard the miner fumbling about for matches, when a groan reached the ears of both men. A moment later Andrews stumbled over an object on the floor.

With a muttered curse he put his hand down, to find it met with a warm, clinging substance. Again the groan.

"My God! Rung, hain't you a match? There's somethin' awful here!" cried Bob Andrews, in a husky voice.

The mine-owner fumbled about in his pockets, found the desired article, and scratched a match quickly, and applied the flame to a tallow dip that stood on a little table near. Then he grasped this and held it up over his head.

A sight met his gaze that sent the blood receding to his trembling heart.

On the floor, weltering in his blood, lay a huge form from which an occasional groan proceeded.

"Great Heaven! it's Jim Hinstraw; and the avenger's knife has found his life!"

This startling exclamation fell from the lips of Bob Andrews, as he knelt suddenly beside

the dying tough, for he certainly was fast losing his grip on life, the haft of a bowie-knife standing above his broad chest.

The man lay with his eyes rolled back, froth and blood staining his bearded lips, while every now and then a deep groan oozed from his huge chest.

In one hand the dying tough clutched a revolver, while the other was closed in a stiffening grip about the mouth of a buckskin sack. When the eyes of the cabin-owner fell on the latter object, he uttered an indignant cry, and tore the buckskin bag from the hand of the dying man.

"Hal! the scoundrel was robbing me—see!" and Bob Andrews held up the sack, which was well filled with nuggets. "Pard, I brought them here from Sure Deal, and the sack was buried under the fireplace. How Long Jim discovered it is more'n I kin guess."

"Long Jim a thief!"

Rung Lapstone seemed horrified at the discovery.

"It's been some time since thieves hev bothered us, Rung. This makes me think of that night in Sure Deal, when—"

"Never mind that," interrupted the mine-owner quickly. "See, the man is not dead. He wants to speak. Perhaps he may be able to tell us something."

And then Rung Lapstone bent over the huge tough, who seemed straining every effort to articulate. Bending his ear to the man's lips, he heard words of a startling nature.

"I—I'm done fur. 'Twas Little Gaudy! I saw him, and—and he said you'd soon foller me ter hell!"

The words of the dying tough came in husky gasps, but they did not fail to carry the weight of a terrible meaning, and the mine-owner reeled back in horror.

A rattle in the red throat, followed by a stiffening of the limbs, and all was over. Jim Hinstraw would no more terrorize the town, when under the influence of Rung Lapstone's poor whisky.

"It's over," uttered Lapstone solemnly, as he rose to his feet. Then, to his horror, he saw that his knees were saturated with the blood of the dead tough, and he felt the warm blood trickle down his limbs with a shudder.

"He is dead," uttered Bob Andrews, as he gained his feet. "It is just as well. He was a thief; he was killed in the act of robbing me—I am not sorry."

A look of grim satisfaction swept the face of the speaker as he gazed upon the corpse of the slaughtered tough.

It was a solemn scene, as the two men stood over the dead, in the dim glow of the candle, and to Rung Lapstone came a most horrible thought. While Bob Andrews seemed to rejoice in the death of the thief one thought, a most terrible one, had escaped him. The hand of Rung Lapstone fell on his companion's arm.

"Bob," and the voice of Rung Lapstone sounded hollow as the grave, "you will cease to rejoice over that man's death when you remember that but two are left of the sixteen who saw Little Gaudy die!"

"You and me are all that's left. It will be your turn next!"

The face of Bob Andrews changed to a sickly yellow most suddenly. He realized the truth of his superior's words. His turn would come next. In his inmost heart, however, he vowed to cheat the avenger, and escape from a merited doom.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

KINKFOOT KARL'S STORY.

How fared it with the prisoners of Kinkfoot Karl?

Several days had passed since the seizure of Evadne Wixwalter and Burril Graylock. The latter was terribly anxious on account of his mining interests, which he feared must suffer during his absence. Twice he appealed to the Mountain Scourge to release him, but he appealed in vain.

And now Graylock cursed himself for not taking his freedom when it was once offered him by the strange outlaw of the mountains. Freedom to walk about during the day was permitted both prisoners, but an attempt to escape would have met with swift punishment, the young prospector believed, as he saw the numerous guards about the place, each one a walking arsenal.

But if this restraint chafed the youth, in it he derived one consolation. He was permitted to be with Evadne, and he found this a source of great comfort. His love for the colonel's daughter deepened as the hours passed, and several times he came near letting the consuming passion of his heart be known to its object.

"But, no, I will not take advantage of the present condition of affairs to declare my love," the youth muttered. "I must wait. She is rich, the sole heiress to Colonel Wixwalter's vast property in San Francisco, and I am but a poor adventurer. Wait. When I strike it rich near Quartzville then I will speak—not before."

Thus did Graylock fortify himself against the tempter.

Sometimes Evadne walked and talked with Kinkfoot Karl in full view of Graylock, and on

such occasions a jealous pang would shoot to the heart of the youth, for there could be no denying the fact, the king of the mountain outlaws was handsome, and his attentions to his fair prisoner were unmistakably those of deepest admiration.

Once the twain passed beyond the sight of Graylock, and half an hour later, when the two returned, the cheeks of Evadne were flushed, and there was a deep and glowing flame in her gray eyes, that at once attracted the notice of Burril Graylock.

He questioned her, but she refused to disclose the cause of her undue excitement. That the maiden had good cause for excitement was evident.

To her Kinkfoot Karl was ever gentle and kind, and she no longer looked upon him as her enemy; consequently, when he invited her to walk on this day she did not refuse.

Scarcely had they passed beyond the sight of the camp and its occupants, when Kinkfoot Karl paused suddenly, seized Evadne's arm, and faced her with a white face and blazing eyes.

"Evadne Wixwalter, I love you! Who could meet you day after day and not lose his heart? If I prove to you that I am free from blood-guiltiness, will you be my wife?"

The words came in a hot passion from the lips of the mountain chief, and his black eyes were riveted on her face in a way that sent a cold chill of fear down her spine.

"Good gracious, Mr. Kinkfoot, what do you mean?" cried the startled girl, scarcely knowing what she said.

"I mean, will you be my wife, Evadne?"

"Your wife? No, no; you are joking now."

"I am not; I am in deathly earnest. I love you, Evadne, and I—"

"Stop," she cried, with a deprecatory wave of her hand. "You must not talk like that. I love you? My soul! it is too horrible to contemplate!" and the maiden shuddered, and pushed the hand of the outlaw from her own, while the look of horror that crossed her beautiful face quite stirred him to the depths.

"I understand your feelings," he cried out bitterly, as he stood with folded arms and heaving bosom, regarding her more in sorrow than in anger.

His broad sombrero shaded his face, and the huge mustache trembled as he continued:

"You despise me, Evadne Wixwalter, because men—villains whose own garments are stained with the blood of innocent people—call me outlaw and tell of the wicked deeds of Kinkfoot Karl. I will not go back on the record I have made, but, in the presence of Heaven, and the girl I love better than my own life, I swear that I never murdered a human being, nor robbed a stage, nor crushed the innocent; but I have waded in gore. My hands are red with the blood of murderers! My dearest friend in the wide world, my only friend, in fact, died a cruel death at the hands of sixteen land-pirates, led by a thief and assassin. 'Tis seldom I tell the story of the past, but I will tell it now. You are listening?"

"Yes," faintly.

"Henry and Lewis were two bosom friends, mountain hunters, who came to the West but a few years since on a mission. They tarried at Sure Deal, a mining-town in California, where one night Henry, or Little Gaudy, as he was termed, was seized, accused of theft, and bound to a tree, where, under the lash, he was ordered to confess a crime he did not commit. Around that brave boy stood sixteen jeering men—bearded diggers, who laughed to see the white flesh of a boy flayed from his back in a manner that would have done credit to a band of Sioux Indians."

"It was rare sport for those human demons, and when the boy, innocent of even the thought of theft, hung insensible upon the tree, the devils of Sure Deal retired to permit him to recover, that they might continue the brutal work. One man came back before the rest, and found Henry breathing, and with open eyes. What did that man do? With his fingers he strangled the boy! It was a damnable deed. When the miners came back, Little Gaudy was dead. One man spurned the body of the boy with his foot, but a bullet found his life to pay for the indignity."

"That night Henry was buried 'neath the mountain soil of California, and the real thief believed himself safe. Ah! but he was not. I was near, and knew of the murder. On bended knee, above Henry's grave, I swore to follow the murderers to the end of the earth, but they should all die. When some of the devils began to die, one by one, a terrible fright seized upon them, and they fled. At last, a year and a half later, the assassins of my friend found refuge in Quartzville and Cape Horn. They were not safe from a wronged man's vengeance, however, for I soon discovered their whereabouts, and Kinkfoot Karl has been at work, as you no doubt know."

"Only a few days since I was fired at by Big Dan, a huge, dwarfish fellow, and one of the sixteen, just after leaving the house of Colonel Wixwalter. It was on the edge of a gorge, and the bullet struck my horse in the neck; the animal reared, and I fell into the bushes, thus de-

ceiving Big Dan into the belief that I, instead of the horse, had received a fatal wound. I escaped with only a few scratches, and fixed Big Dan a little later, as he was on the point of shooting your father. Several times I have saved the colonel's life. I wish him no harm, but the king of Quartzville must die. He will fall, and then the last of the sixteen will be out of the world—then my vengeance will be complete, and Kinkfoot Karl will no longer ride the mountain trails as the terrible Scourge; his mission will be at an end, and—well, I hoped to go back to the world, and rear me a home among civilized people; but now it cannot be. When Rung Lapstone dies, Kinkfoot Karl will leave Idaho forever; you will see him no more."

The outlaw turned his face away then, evidently to hide what he deemed unmanly emotion.

Evadne's heart was strangely moved.

"Kinkfoot Karl, forgive me," she said, in a low tone. "Your mission has been a terrible one, yet I cannot deny the justness of your vengeance."

"Then you do not think me quite a demon?"

Once more the outlaw turned upon his fair companion, and transfixed her with his magnetic black eyes.

"Far from it," she answered.

He snatched her hand and pressed it to his lips. She drew away from him sharply, however, and would have fled but for his detaining hand.

"Thrice have I saved your father's life, Evadne, and this is your gratitude—"

"Gratitude! Kinkfoot Karl, you have more than that; but love is a different thing. If you had never been aught but a Christian gentleman I could not love you."

"Ah, I see! You love Graylock?"

Her cheeks reddened under his keen glance. He still held her fast, and she could not move.

"It is well, Evadne Wixwalter. But bear me now, and remember that what I set my heart on I always accomplish. You shall not wed young Burril Graylock, this I swear. Sooner would I see you the bride of Death, and him swinging between the heavens and the earth!"

Then the outlaw dropped his hand from the maiden's arm and strode away.

Quite startled at the words of the fierce man, Evadne returned to the camp with perturbed feelings and fluttering heart. In vain Graylock tried to learn what had passed between Evadne and the outlaw.

"You must not question me," cried the girl; "and what is more, you must not speak to me again while we are here."

"Why not? What have I done to give offense, Evadne?" persisted the young prospector. "Nothing to me," she answered.

This was some hours after the maiden's interview with Kinkfoot Karl, as described above. She knew that the outlaw was possessed of strong passions, and that it would be like him to murder Graylock on small provocation, and she did not wish to give the terrible Scourge the shadow of a pretext for such a crime.

Night shadows were falling while Graylock stood beside Evadne and questioned her.

"Evadne, I love you!"

The words came in a thrilling whisper, and both the hands of Graylock rested on the maiden's shoulders, while he essayed to peer into her tender gray eyes, now full of terror and dismay.

"I love you. I meant not to speak so soon, but—"

A crunching step cut short his words.

A man in Mexican costume confronted them, his black eyes flaming with a terrible anger. Evadne recognized him, and uttered a terrified cry. It was Kinkfoot Karl, and he had heard the last words uttered by Burril Graylock.

CHAPTER XXXV.

OUT OF ONE DANGER INTO ANOTHER.

FOR some moments Kinkfoot Karl stood regarding his two prisoners without uttering a word. Evadne realized that he was very angry and she shuddered when she saw his fierce glances cast upon the man who had just declared his love for her.

"So this is how it stands?"

Low, yet with a sharp hiss, the words came from the lips of the outlaw. Evadne trembled for the safety of Burril Graylock then.

"Eavesdropper!" sneered the young prospector, who would have this fling if it cost him his life.

"Scoundrel!" hissed Kinkfoot Karl.

Then he stepped back, and opening his cloak, revealed his belt of glittering knives.

"Select your blade, young fellow. We will settle this trouble at once. It will be sport for the boys, and as for me, I feel that I shall split your heart at the first pass," uttered the outlaw in sneering tones.

"Merciful Heaven! this must not be," groaned Evadne under her breath; yet at that moment she was unable to speak, or lift a finger to prevent the collision. She saw Burril Graylock lean forward and draw a bowie from the belt of the mountain outlaw, saw the two men walk

away toward the blazing fire, and then reeled against a tree, and closed her eyes against the trunk, to shut out the awful sight.

"My soul! it would be murder!" she finally uttered, as she remembered that Kinkfoot Karl was an expert with the knife, while Burril would doubtless prove but a blundering amateur.

Then she seemed suddenly endowed with new strength, and moved quickly toward the fire, near which were gathered a group of men curious to witness the knife-duel about to take place.

Kinkfoot Karl had flung aside his cloak and belt of knives, and stood with clinched teeth, grasping the hilt of a single bowie in his right hand. Facing him was Burril Graylock, white yet calm, a look of sturdy determination flashing from his eyes.

"Burril Graylock, are you ready?"

"Ready!" answered the youth, bracing himself for the struggle.

The young prospector towered full a head above the mountain outlaw, yet a smile of perfect confidence touched the face of Kinkfoot Karl. He understood his own superiority and felt utterly safe.

"Then defend yourself!"

With the words, Kinkfoot Karl moved toward the prisoner.

A silence hung pall-like over the scene.

"Stop—this is murder!"

The next instant Evadne Wixwalter sprang between the two men, facing Kinkfoot Karl, her face white, her gray eyes aflame with a firm purpose. Kinkfoot Karl lowered his knife.

"Girl, you will stand aside," he said hissing; "the world is not wide enough for Burril Graylock and I. He must die!"

"Ay! stand aside, Evadne," uttered Graylock. "This is a fair fight, and I mean to rid the world of a merciless outlaw."

But Evadne refused to obey.

"It is not a fair fight," she cried, keeping her eyes on the face of Kinkfoot Karl. "You know, sir, that this would be murder. Not long ago you boasted to me that no innocent blood was on your hands, that you sought only vengeance against those who had basely wronged you. This man you would slay, has not by word or deed injured you, Kinkfoot Karl. If you are a man as you profess to be, you will not raise your hand against Burril Graylock. If you are a craven assassin you will proceed with the work of murder."

Then Evadne stepped aside, but did not take her eyes from the face of the outlaw captain.

Her words were not without their effect.

A deep flush mounted the cheek and brow of the young outlaw. Turning, he raised his hand and flung his naked bowie to the ground at Evadne's feet.

A cry of surprise went up from a dozen lips.

"The girl is right, it would be murder," cried Kinkfoot Karl.

"Coward!" sneered the prisoner, in a way that was most provoking. Quickly Kinkfoot Karl turned and faced the speaker, a mad anger flashing through his midnight eyes. With a mighty effort he crushed down the feelings that welled in his bosom, and biting his mustached lip he strode away into the shadows.

"Burril, in Heaven's name, keep quiet," remonstrated the maiden, passing quickly to the young man's side. "Kinkfoot Karl would have killed you had you fought."

"Possibly."

"Certainly," said Evadne. "Burril, you must cease your insulting language to Kinkfoot Karl. He is very sensitive, and has a fiery temper. You see how quickly he left when he realized his position. It was to save you that he did so. For my sake, Burril, do nothing to anger him in the future."

"For your sake I obey then," uttered the youth, who caught a look in the maiden's gray eyes that sent a thrill to his heart, and whispered the one word "Hope" to his soul.

There was peace after the storm. The prisoners did not see Kinkfoot Karl again that night. He had gone away by himself, to fight the greatest battle of his life, to struggle for the mastery over himself.

Burril Graylock attempted to conceal the knife that the interrupted duel had placed in his hand, but one of the outlaws was sharp enough to see and deprive him of it. After that a strict watch was kept over the young man, but Evadne was permitted to wander about at will.

Kinkfoot was not around, and of a sudden thoughts of escape came to her brain.

She communicated her thoughts to Burril Graylock, who agreed with her that escape was possible. With a parting pressure of the hand, and a God speed from the young prospector, Evadne moved quietly away into the shadows of the night.

Where was Kinkfoot Karl that he did not see the moving form of a maiden, stealing along among the trees at the base of a mountain ridge? This question we cannot answer, we only know that Evadne passed the spot where the outer guard usually paced, to find no one there to-night. Perhaps, in the stirred feelings that whelmed his soul that night, the mountain

outlaw forgot to place his guards; perhaps it was the fault of an underling.

It mattered little to the fleeing girl. She soon found herself beyond even the glow of the mountain fire, and soon she was speeding along a narrow mountain trail that she believed led to Cape Horn.

For once, however, the daring maid was out in her reckoning. More than one trail crossed the Idaho mountains, and the one she struck by chance on this night, was an old Indian path, that led toward Quartzville. In following it, however, the maiden was placing distance between herself and the outlaw camp, which was something gained at least.

The moon was up, but obscured the longer part of the time by fitting clouds, yet Evadne was enabled by its light to keep the trail, along which she sped as rapidly as the rugged nature of the ground would permit.

In time she paused to take breath and look about. Not yet would she admit that she was fatigued, and only permitted herself a minute's rest, then passed on as before.

Her feet trod a dangerous path at times, yet Evadne, nothing daunted, kept on her way, until she knew full well that the trail she followed did not lead to Cape Horn. This in itself was quite a disappointment.

Tired at last, the girl withdrew a little from the trail, and under shelter of a huge rock sunk down to rest. Soon a strange drowsiness came over her, and in a little time she slept. How long she remained in this state the maiden had no means of knowing, but at length she opened her eyes with a start, feeling the touch of a hand on her shoulder.

The bright sunlight of new-born day was streaming over the mountain crags—night had passed like a fitting dream, and now Evadne Wixwalter started to her feet with a low cry of amazement and alarm.

A tall, thin man—a half-breed—stood confronting her, with a grim smile on his countenance. He was armed with rifle and revolver, and in his belt were knife and hatchet.

"White girl no scare. Joe not hurt little lady," said the man in fair English.

"I must have been sleeping soundly," uttered Evadne, rubbing her eyes. "Did you just now discover me?"

"Yes."

"Who are you?"

"Injun Joe."

"I have heard your name spoken by the miners of Cape Horn. You are friendly to the whites?"

"Yes."

"Can you tell me how far I am from Cape Horn?"

"Good many mile," answered Indian Joe. "Go with me now. Girl must be hungry, and berry tired," and Pewomo laid his hand on the girl's arm.

"Admitted; but where will you take me?"

"To Injin's home, where git rest and something eat."

"No, no, I do not wish to go there. My home is in Cape Horn. Can you not guide me there, Mr. Joe?"

"Me can, and will soon. You Curnel Wixwalter girl?"

"Yes—"

"Me know so. Come with Joe now. Everything be all right."

Evadne hesitated, not favorably impressed with the yellow face of the thin half-breed; but her hesitation was cut short by Indian Joe, who seized her arm and drew her forcibly forward.

Evadne was a girl of sense, and concluded it best not to offer resistance just now. Thus thinking she followed the Indian from the spot.

A mile's walk brought them to a secluded dell, into which the half-breed led the maiden, pausing at last in front of an opening in the side of the hill—the mouth of a cave.

The dell was a delightful spot. Grass grew green along the edge of a little brook, and even flowers bloomed in places, lending their fragrance to the pure mountain air. When the Indian paused he uttered a low cry, which was answered by a crooked red hag, who came out of the cave.

"Take white girl inside," growled Indian Joe, pointing at Evadne.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE DYING CHIEF.

ONCE more Evadne Wixwalter found herself a prisoner, for she knew that the old half-breed and his wife meant to hold her captive, but for what reason she could not imagine.

The opening to the cave was large and considerable light was admitted to the interior. Indian Joe followed the two inside, and spoke a few words in his native tongue to the hag and then departed, and Evadne saw no more of him for hours.

The red hag gave bread and meat to Evadne, and the girl realizing that she would need all her strength in the future, forced herself to eat.

After a time the maiden walked to the mouth of the cave, and gazed out into the beautiful dell. When she would step forth the hand of the squaw fell on her arm.

"Must stay here," uttered the red hag sharply.

"But I would like to walk in the sunshine," returned Evadne.

"Well."

But the hag followed close behind, and when well out into the light, Evadne saw a gleaming pistol in the squaw's red right hand. This meant that a tigress was on guard—she was a prisoner still!

"Why is this?" Evadne demanded, turning angrily upon the old hag. "Who set you to guard me? Perhaps you do not know that Colonel Wixwalter will bring you and your husband to account for this."

"Me know. White girl safe here all same."

This was true enough, and Evadne walked on, her steps closely dogged by the red tigress of the cave.

Once the girl cast a sharp look at her guard, and the thought was in her brain to leap upon the horrible red Jezebel and attempt to wrest the pistol from her. She might succeed, but if she should fail, the hag would doubtless murder her.

No, it was best to wait a while. She seemed in no grave danger just at present. Perhaps the thin old half-breed meant no harm after all.

As the maiden walked down the creek, she came to a sudden halt beside a long, narrow mound, at one end of which was a rude board.

It was a grave!

"Some one was buried here," murmured the startled girl. "Who?"

The last word was uttered in a loud tone, and addressed to the red tigress.

"Can't white girl read?" grunted the squaw.

Sure enough, on close inspection, Evadne discovered rude letters on the headboard. Bending low she read the name, and then started back with a wondering cry.

"Marion Wixwalter—aged 44."

No wonder the girl was startled at seeing the name.

Not often had Colonel Wixwalter mentioned the name of his dead wife, but Evadne knew that it was Marion; and with a feeling of startled awe she stood beside the grave of the martyred wife, with a fierce wave of sensation rising up in her soul.

Ah, what would not her father give to look upon the last resting-place of her beloved so well.

Evadne had heard from her foster-parent's lips the story of the past, of Rung Lapstone's wickedness, and of poor Marion's slow death as a prisoner in a mountain cave. This then was the spot where the woman, her aunt, had dragged out the last miserable years of her life; a prisoner without hope—oh! it was woeful, and the tender heart of Evadne was touched so deeply that tears filled her eyes.

"A cold, cruel, heartless deed," murmured the maiden, kneeling suddenly at the head of the mound.

So deeply was the girl moved as not to see the two forms entering the dell at the far end. She still crouched there, with her loosened masses of brown hair falling like a cloud of misty gold about her neck and shoulders, when a crunching tread roused her with the suddenness of lightning.

She sprang to her feet to find herself face to face with Rung Lapstone!

A little way off stood the half-breed, regarding Evadne with a peculiar smile. The truth flashed upon the maiden's brain suddenly. Indian Joe's absence was explained. He had been to Quartzville to inform the miner king of his finding the colonel's daughter in the mountains.

"I am glad to see you, Evadne," said the villain with a smile. "Your father and I have scarcely rested since you were torn from your home. We have searched high and low for you. This is indeed a happiness—"

"Scoundrell! Hypocrite! I hate and despise you," uttered Evadne, with a degree of emphasis that quite surprised the flattering villain.

"Be careful, girl!" warned Lapstone, with a mutt, red oath. "I am human, and—"

"Human!"

There was a world of contemptuous sarcasm in the word as uttered by Evadne. The tears had left her eyes now, and they were flashing with an angry, scornful flame not pleasant to contemplate.

"It was the deed of a demon! You murdered her by inches, merely to vent your hate upon a helpless woman who scorned your advances. She sleeps well, but her murderer will not triumph long. Heaven will not permit it!"

Evadne pointed at the narrow mound, and for once the guilty soul of the Quartzville king quailed, and for some moments he was unable to speak as he wished. Finally, however, he regained his wonted composure.

"I put the name on the board," he said, "and meant some day to show this grave to Colonel Wixwalter. I had no hand in the woman's death. But I am not here to discuss this subject to-day. I wish you to accompany me from this place. I don't imagine you care to remain here."

"No. Where will you take me?"

"To Quartzville—home if you like."

She regarded him fixedly for some moments ere she made reply to the villain. She was

thinking now of the story Kinkfoot Karl had told her on the previous day, the story of the murdered dandy of the mines, and Rung Lapstone's guilty connection with the sad work.

What a vile scoundrel he was. And now should she trust herself in his care?

"You must decide quickly," finally articulated the villain. "I came for you, and it is for you to say whether you go with me willingly or otherwise."

"You are then determined that I shall keep you company?"

"I am."

"Why?"

"That question I cannot discuss here."

"Will you take me to Cape Horn if I consent to go without trouble?"

"Yes, rather than have trouble I will take you there, although the distance is much greater than to Quartzville. All I seek is to return you safe home, where your father and his new housekeeper are in deep trouble on your account."

"His housekeeper?" questioned Evadne, in surprise.

"Mother Armore, of course. You don't know the lady?"

"No; the name is a new one to me."

"Well, she's there all the same, and will receive her long-lost daughter with open arms!" and the mine-owner laughed immoderately. "But this isn't business. I am anxious to be on the move."

With considerable doubt as to what was best, Evadne consented to accompany the mine-owner from the place, he solemnly promising to take her home to Cape Horn.

Not ten minutes had they been gone when two mounted men rode into the little mountain dell. The path was steep that led to the cave, but the little mustang and bay horse were sure-footed and not unused to threading mountain trails.

"Whoa, Bugs, whoa!" cried the well-known voice of our old friend, Pete Homespun.

The man who was in advance was a giant in size, and clad in buckskin breeches and tunic. About his waist was strapped a belt, from which depended a knife and brace of revolvers. This personage was, of course, Samson Hyte, who was much with Yankee Pete since he examined into the saddle-bags, and learned the man's story, some time before.

The two now traveled in company, seeking information on a certain subject of vital importance to more than one person connected with our Western life drama.

"This is the place, eh?" uttered Samson Hyte, as he drew rein and allowed his hand to cover the butt of a revolver.

"It's the place," answered the Yankee with a shudder, as he gazed at the sides of the mountain beyond the opening to the cave.

"And there's the black devil who runs their ranch," uttered the giant miner, as Indian Joe stepped into the sunlight from the bowels of the earth.

Instantly the giant miner covered the thin half-breed with his revolver, and guided his horse to his side.

"How d'ye do, old chap? You live hyar, I reckon?"

"Ugh! What white man want?"

"I'll tell yer w'at I want," returned Hyte, in a stern voice. "It's Mrs. Wixwalter and her boys! Jest tell me whar they be, or I'll fill yer old yaller skull full o' lead slugs!"

Without evincing the least surprise, Indian Joe pointed to the narrow mound some rods away.

"Dere the white squaw lay."

"Look a-hyar—"

But the stout miner was not permitted to finish his speech. A clang of hoofs rung on the air, and as Samson Hyte looked about, he saw, to his surprise, several mounted men making their way into the dell. But these men did not attract his attention so much as did four in advance, who entered the gully on foot, bearing between them the form of a man on a stretcher made from blankets.

Was it a funeral party?

Yankee Pete reined aside and the procession moved forward, the four footmen depositing their burden on the grass.

Almost with the movement, Indian Joe darted from his position and fell on his knees beside the form on the ground—the form of an Indian, whose face was of a sickly yellow and contorted with pain.

"Nataniscom, w'at dis mean?" cried the half-breed, in tones of surprise and grief.

At this moment the leader of the troop stepped to the front, and said:

"This old Indian we found at the foot of a cliff, where he had fallen. He is likely to die, and directed us here, where he said his brother lived. We have complied. I know the old chap, since he was once a friend of mine. He and I have lived in the same wigwam in Arizona. I think he is badly injured and will die."

Then the speaker stood with folded arms, watching the two men on the grass, an intense, deeply-anxious glow in his black eyes.

Samson Hyte started as he gazed at this man,

whose cloak and broad sombrero were not new to him.

It was the notorious Kinkfoot Karl.

The old Indian, who was evidently dying, rolled his eyes toward the young mountain outlaw, and in low accents uttered a name that caused the man to start and bend quickly over the old man of the mountain.

A startled look came to the face of Pewomo or Indian Joe, and with a fierce gesture he attempted to stop the confession that old Nataniscom seemed about to make.

"Mus' tell truth now. Great Spirit angry me not do it."

Indian Joe moved as if to depart, but the muzzle of Samson Hyte's revolver covered his heart, and in a low, yet fierce tone he hissed:

"Move a ha'r and ye'r a dead Injin!"

And so Joe Pewomo was compelled to remain and listen to the last words of the old Apache chief, whose every breath, at the last, was a groan.

The story he told held his listeners spell-bound, and when he finished, and his head lay back, with great drops of sweat upon his brow, Samson Hyte glanced toward Pete Homespun to see him tremble violently, and to note the fact that he was deathly pale.

Two minutes later the old Indian ceased to breathe, and Kinkfoot Karl sprung to his feet with a great cry.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

BUT ONE REMAINS.

"I HAVE suspected this for a long time. The trail draws near its end!"

With the words, Kinkfoot Karl turned upon Indian Joe, a fierce glow shooting from his eyes.

"Indian, it is useless for you to deny anything. Your fate now depends on the future. If you obey me implicitly your life may be spared. You have served Rung Lapstone for years, but his race is run, and the tide having turned, it is time, if you would save your withered old carcass, to trim your sails to the changing gale."

"Not an hour ago Evadne Wixwalter was here—we trailed her to this spot. Now produce the girl, or take the consequences."

The speaker threw back his cloak, revealing a belt gleaming with weapons, and fixed his black eyes, in a keen gaze, on the face of the half-breed.

The latter quailed.

He realized that his old employer was at the end of his trail, and that a new order of things was soon to be ushered in.

"Up dere," and Indian Joe pointed to the path by which the outlaws had entered the dell. "The girl go with the big miner dat way. Go to Quartzville, mebbe."

"What? Evadne in the hands of Rung Lapstone?"

"Yes, me say so; gone only little while."

"Boys, we are on the right trail, and it nears its end," cried Kinkfoot Karl, turning to his followers. "This day the long tragedy of years shall end. Rung Lapstone shall go to Hades, and the final act in the great tragedy will end. Come, my vengeance on the boss demon of the age is at last to fall."

Then the outlaw turned and was about to walk away, when a hand fell on his arm.

"Pard, ain't you a little off the handle?"

It was Samson Hyte who spoke, and Kinkfoot Karl turned toward him with an impatient frown.

"Don't git mad, cap'n. You'n' I hez been friends. I was Little Gaudy's friend, too, so, ef you won't scowl so I'll jest put in a word."

"Well?"

"We better take him 'long with us."

The long arm of Samson Hyte pointed toward the withered old half-breed, who seemed anxious to get from under the gaze of the scowling whites.

"The suggestion is not out of place," uttered the Mountain Scourge. "You may bring the old villain with you, Samson."

"Kerrect."

In vain Indian Joe protested. The strong hand of the giant miner fell to his shoulder, and a moment later the beautiful bay horse, Storm, was carrying double, while a look of delight wrinkled the plump face of Samson Hyte.

Kinkfoot Karl was one of the four men who had assisted in carrying the old Apache chief into the dell. A little way outside, four horses were encountered, in charge of one of the band. The outlaw chief mounted and once more assumed his place at the head of his men.

Before setting out in pursuit of Lapstone, Kinkfoot Karl held a council of war.

"No use of all following one trail," asserted the outlaw captain. "I have an idea that Rung Lapstone will attempt to cross the mountains and gain the California trail. His scheming has been successful so far as securing Evadne Wixwalter is concerned. Doubtless he has a fleet horse, and will put distance between himself and Idaho without delay. This, however, may be a mis'taken surmise. Instead, the villain may go directly to Quartzville. We must anticipate him in any event, and to do this it will be necessary to divide our party."

This was done, six men following Kinkfoot Karl.

Divided into three parties, the outlaws followed as many different courses, and it was not likely that Rung Lapstone would escape the avengers who were on his track.

With the chief went Samson Hyte, Yankee Pete and Burril Graylock. The latter was no longer a prisoner. Since the discovery of Evadne's flight, Kinkfoot Karl had treated the young prospector with unusual kindness, and at once offered him his liberty. Until the girl was found, however, the youth concluded to remain with the outlaws; and thus we see him now, well mounted, riding with the outlaw chief. He was not one of those who had entered the valley, consequently had not heard the dying chief's remarkable story.

Samson Hyte was glad to meet his employer, and warm words of greeting passed between them.

In the mean time Rung Lapstone was hurrying from the vicinity of the lone dell, with the prize he had so long coveted, in his possession.

Just without the mountain dell Rung Lapstone encountered three men with horses. One of these was Bob Andrews, the others men of courage, whom the King of Quartzville had selected for a certain purpose.

With Bob Andrews the mine-owner had planned to flee from Idaho. Perhaps they might hide themselves in the land of Latter Day Saints for a time, but eventually they expected to bring up at San Francisco, where the scheming mine-owner expected to revel in love and gold after he was assured of the death of Colonel Wixwalter, which would not be long delayed.

Lapstone would have remained in Quartzville until assured of the colonel's death, had he not been seized with a mortal fear of the avenging knife that had thus far slain fourteen of his followers.

Bob Andrews was even more anxious to flee than was his chief, and so, when Indian Joe came to Quartzville with the news that Evadne was in his hands, Lapstone at once planned for flight. The half-breed had been liberally rewarded, and now, with good horses under them, the villains felt elated.

Evadne occupied a position in front of Rung Lapstone on the same horse. Instead of going toward Quartzville, the miner king followed a trail to the southwest, that would carry them far to the right of Cape Horn.

Forty miles away the country would become comparatively level, with the mountains behind, and then, once here, the safety of the party would be assured.

Evadne was quite bewildered by the shifting scene, and not knowing the country, was of course unable to discover whether they were aiming for Cape Horn, or in the opposite direction. She had little faith in Rung Lapstone, however, and could only hope for the best while looking for the worst.

At first the flight was not a rapid one, the nature of the ground not permitting it; but in a little time the higher elevations were left in the rear, and the trail became less steep and dangerous. Clumps of trees dotted the hills and vales, and the panorama that passed before the eyes of the maiden was far from being an unpleasant one.

Soon Evadne was satisfied that Quartzville was not the destination of the party with whom she found herself. Were they then going toward Cape Horn?

A sudden, terrible fear entered the girl's heart, as she turned to Rung Lapstone with the question:

"Are you taking me to Cape Horn?"

"Certainly, my dear; rest easy on that score," was the mine-owner's answer.

It may seem strange to the reader that Lapstone should depart from Quartzville leaving all his wealth behind; but in reality the man whom people looked upon as the king of Quartzville was poor. He had squandered the stealings that doomed Little Gaudy to a martyr's grave, and though managing to keep up an appearance of wealth, he really owned nothing. The mine he worked was soon to pass into the hands of one who held a mortgage against everything the "king" possessed of any value, and so Rung Lapstone had few ties to bind him to the mining city. Some gold and bank-notes he had, amounting to a few thousand, and these were stowed safely in a belt about his body next the flesh.

It was after noon that the party halted on a level plot of ground, where a spring of crystal water bubbled from under a rock.

"We will rest here a few minutes, and allow our animals to feed and drink," said Lapstone.

Then he slipped to the ground and raised his hands to lift Evadne from the saddle. Almost on the instant the maiden uttered a horrified scream.

A bright gleam of steel flashed before her eyes, followed by a thud, and the next instant Bob Andrews sunk to the mountain soil, with a Bowie-blade through his neck!

"My God! the Avenger is on our track!" cried the startled voice of Rung Lapstone. The

next instant he vaulted into the saddle and hoarsely articulated: "Forward, boys; out of this for your lives!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A DESPERATE VILLAIN.

NEVER once did the frightened miner look back, after uttering the startled words closing our last chapter, but planting spurs to his horse sped away at breakneck speed across the plot and into a mountain gorge, that was shadowed to gloom by the towering cliffs.

Not far behind clattered the two men, as badly frightened as was their leader.

"My soul! we must go anywhere now to escape the avenger!" cried Rung Lapstone, as he glared ahead, looking for some convenient point to leave the trail and dodge the pursuing knife-thrower.

Evadne said nothing.

She, too, was badly frightened; but she soon calmed her fears, when she remembered that the man who had fallen was a friend to the villainous mine-owner of Quartzville, and consequently his slayer must be a friend to her. She had heard of the doings of Kinkfoot Karl, and believed that he had thrown the knife, in which case he must be in pursuit of Rung Lapstone.

She did not fear the mountain outlaw as she feared the man in whose power she now found herself, and consequently she was quite willing that the Mountain Scourge should overtake and capture Rung Lapstone.

Passing through the gorge, the miner king came out into a clump of stunted trees. No path seemed to open in any direction. Was he then cornered?

Doubtless Kinkfoot Karl, if he was on the trail, would follow him into the gorge, and then a fight to the death would be the result.

There was no place through which a horse could pass.

It would not do to turn back and thus meet the terrible avenger. After coming out of the gorge, Lapstone listened, but heard no sound. Certain it was that the two men had not followed, or if they had, they had been stricken down before entering the cleft in the hills.

"Where are those men, girl? Did you see them enter the gorge?" finally demanded Rung Lapstone.

"No. They took a path to the left and escaped. You have run into a trap!" answered the girl, an exulting ring in her voice.

He noticed her elation and swore roundly.

"Girl! do you wish to fall into the hands of Kinkfoot Karl again?"

"I do not fear him. He is a gentleman, while you are a villain—"

She paused suddenly, regretting perhaps that she had gone so far, as she saw the change that came over his face, rendering it demoniacal in expression.

"Girl!" he hissed, with grating teeth, "you will be sorry for this. I am a desperate man now. I did intend to take you to Cape Horn, but there is one on my track who is as merciless as a jungle tiger, and he may doom both of us. If he does come, this shall find your heart!"

The villain displayed a narrow-bladed knife, as he shot the words venomously into the girl's face.

Evadne saw that her position was indeed a critical one. Should Kinkfoot Karl come to the rescue, her life might be sacrificed to the vengeful wrath of the doomed mine-owner. The situation was indeed a terrible one.

"In a trap you said. No, we are not. You shall see how I will escape from this, thwart all my enemies, and wear the jewel I have won at such a sacrifice.

Then the man slipped from the saddle and lifted his fair companion down to his side. He had already lost minutes of precious time. The twain stood now on a narrow shelf. Below, forty feet, were rocks and boulders.

"Down there he will not be discovered."

With this muttered sentence Rung Lapstone pushed the girl to a spot where she could not flee without passing him, then he turned to his horse, and deliberately drew his knife across the animal's throat.

A minute later the noble beast staggered over the cliff, and rolled into the bottom of the hole beneath them.

"There, he won't find the horse, and—"

A faint report rung on the ears of the twain, cutting short the remarks of the Quartzville king. It served to startle and warn the villain. Quickly he turned to Evadne and laid his hand on her arm.

"Quick! we must get out of this."

Pushing the maiden in front of him, Rung Lapstone made his way along the narrow ledge until he encountered a steep ascent, almost perpendicular, yet not hard of ascent by one well versed in climbing mountain steeps. There were branches to cling to, and with such aid the king of miners toiled up the ascent, with his fair captive at his side.

When they gained the summit of the elevation, both were greatly fatigued, and paused to rest in the shadow of a bush-crowned bight.

The twain were well screened by bushes, and here, free from observing eyes, Rung Lapstone

planned his future movements. He realized that the terrible Mountain Scourge was not far away, seeking him with the vindictiveness of a tiger and the pertinacity of a sleuth-hound. This knowledge was not calculated to make Rung Lapstone joyous and happy. Not a very agreeable companion was he for the beautiful Evadne.

"Would that night were here," muttered the fugitive.

Then he examined his revolvers—he carried two of the useful weapons—and noted the fact that they were all right. The movements of the slayer were so silent and mysterious, it was not by any means certain that these weapons would prove of much use against him.

The last of the sixteen!

With what keen alarm the miner king of Quartzville realized this the reader can imagine. Was it possible for him to escape the avenger of Little Gaudy? Then again came the haunting face of the murdered boy. That face had more than once appeared to Rung Lapstone, and he found himself wondering if he had been really haunted by the dead, or did the Dandy of the Mines still live, after the flogging and choking he had received?

Impossible.

This was the decision arrived at by the miner king.

After resting a bit Rung Lapstone crept forward, ordering Evadne to remain where she was. But a few yards away he came to a pause, to find himself overlooking a narrow trail, many rods beneath him. Along this trail were moving forms, several horsemen, and with them he saw the two men who had lately kept him company.

"So, so," muttered Lapstone. "The two scamps have joined the enemy. That is as far as I can trust any of the scoundrels who pretend to serve me."

Long and earnestly the concealed villain gazed after the moving men, and he breathed easier as he saw them going further and further away each moment.

He recognized the man in the lead as Samson Hyte, and just behind him came the Yankee, whose white, bell-crowned hat was conspicuous even at this distance. Then came a horse with a double burden, and one of these was Indian Joe!

Rung Lapstone made this discovery with a start.

"By the powers! I am euchered all round it seems," growled the scheming villain. "Even the durn'd Indian has gone back on me. I don't see Kinkfoot Karl with the crowd. Doubtless he is still searching in the gulch for me. I must go back and watch for him. Heavens! wouldn't it be a happy moment if I could draw bead on that scoundrel!"

The mine-owner turned about as the last man of the troop below disappeared, and then he uttered a mad cry, and had sprung quickly back to the position he had left but three minutes before.

Why this cry of rage?

Evadne had disappeared.

Rung Lapstone had forgotten the maiden in his earnest scrutiny of the men following the trail below, and she, brave and daring to the last extreme, had improved the opportunity to glide away. She could not be far off, however. Quickly the fugitive miner gazed into the gulch from which he had but lately climbed, expecting to see the maiden. In this he was disappointed.

"She has not then taken the back track," muttered Lapstone, as his keen eye searched the place below. "Hades! what a fool I was to leave her for a moment."

Then, swearing fiercely, he crept hurriedly along the elevated ground, and soon discovered a path that led along the side of the mountain, which was undoubtedly the one taken by the fleeing girl.

In fact it was really the only means of exit from the bush-crowned flat, save by the way they had come from the gulch.

One glance at the soil showed the imprint of a woman's foot, and with an exultant cry Rung Lapstone dashed rapidly away in pursuit.

Of a sudden, however, he came to a pause.

He realized that, in his mad pursuit of the girl, he might run into a trap. Kinkfoot Karl was certainly looking for him, and could not be far away. The thought gave the fleeing miner king a thrill of fear, that almost unnerved him.

The last of the sixteen!

This thought haunted the villain more than he dared to acknowledge.

"But the girl. I must find her," he cried aloud. "If I lose Evadne, my whole existence is forever blighted."

Then the demon of Sure Deal sprung along the trail once more. Of a sudden he stumbled, and fell down a declivity, coming to the bottom with a decided shock. Half-stunned, he sat up and looked about him.

Then a low, exultant cry escaped his lips.

He looked into the face of Evadne Wixwalter.

The girl was found. She too had been flung down the steep, and the shock had rendered her unable to move for the time, and Rung Lapstone had nearly fallen against her in his descent.

"Found at last, sweet girl!" exclaimed the

stout villain, gaining his feet, and moving to her side. "Are you hurt, Evadne?"

"I—yes, but not badly, I hope," she murmured.

Her face was white as death.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

END OF THE TRAIL.

"THIS is what comes of running away from your lawful and loving guardian," uttered Rung Lapstone with a scowl.

Then he drew her to her feet, but she sunk quickly back with a cry of pain, and the deathly pallor that filled her face proclaimed that she was not attempting to deceive him. Perhaps she was mortally injured. The thought was not a pleasant one to contemplate.

"Durnation! girl, what are you whining about? You brought this on yourself by trying to get clear of me. You thought to escape, I suppose. Come, it will not do to stop here. If you will brace up and try to walk, we will go toward Cape Horn. I am honestly trying to return you to your father's arms, Evadne. Come, make another try."

Again the villain lifted the girl to her feet, but she could not stand. It was with difficulty that she suppressed a cry of pain. One of her ankles had been severely wrenched in her descent, and it might be a long time ere the maiden would be able to journey on foot.

"St. Jago! what am I to do?" growled Rung Lapstone, in a tone of severe disappointment.

Scarcely had the words been uttered when a sound fell on the ears of the twain—the clang and clatter of horse-hoofs.

The sound was rather a startling one, and the fugitive king of Quartzville became extremely uneasy.

Seeing a movement on the part of Evadne that would result in a cry of alarm, he closed her lips with a motion of his hand, and then he moved away to take observations, and see who was passing along the mountain trail but a few rods distant.

The mine-owner was nearly on a level with the trail, and when he peered forth, he looked square into the face of a man he least desired to see at that moment—Colonel Wixwalter!

He was discovered, however, and could not escape, since a revolver gleamed in his face, while a stern voice cried:

"Hands up, scoundrel!"

A long cavalcade—at least a score of Cape Horn miners—was behind the colonel, whose unexpected discovery brought each man to a halt.

"You're the man we have been looking for," pursued the colonel sternly. "Come forth and give an account of yourself."

The ex-mine-owner stepped into full view, and stood striking his beard with the utmost coolness, as he looked at the white, troubled face of Colonel Wixwalter.

"You were looking for me, colonel—why?" demanded the villain composedly.

"To take you into custody."

"Eh? For what—"

"For the murder of Marion Wixwalter and her children," cried the colonel with deepening sternness. "It was worse than the massacre at Mountain Meadow. You start and wonder why this sudden move on my part, but it is not so sudden as you imagine. We have been to Quartzville, but learned there that you had fled. Old Carabel said so, and that you robbed her of all her valuables—you haven't a friend there today. Ah! Harris Maltby, your doom has come. The real owner of the mines, and property you claimed in Quartzville, has come, and you are a branded thief and outlaw—"

"Hades!"

His words fell hissing from the lips of the mad villain. He saw the foundation slipping from under his feet most rapidly. He had one card left, and this he would play, a card that might bring him safety, if nothing more, and this was all-important just now.

"Colonel Wixwalter, men are plotting my ruin for a purpose," he said, with astonishing calmness. "I have been absent from Quartzville but a few hours, on an errand that deeply concerns you as well as myself."

"Well?"

"Colonel, if I restore Evadne to your arms alive and well, will you permit me to go my way in peace?"

"Can you do this?"

"I can."

"Then you shall do it. I will make you no promises."

"Nothing can force me to reveal the whereabouts of the girl but your promise of immunity from harm," said Rung Lapstone, as he stood facing the colonel with folded arms, all the time a prey to the keenest anxiety for fear that Evadne would make herself known by an outcry.

"I will promise you a fair trial, that is all I can do."

"I accept your offer. Protection and a fair hearing, colonel?"

"Yes, I promise."

Quickly the fallen king of Quartzville darted away.

Colonel Wixwalter slipped from his horse and followed.

A moment later, father and daughter met

under the frowning mountain-side, while, with folded arms and smiling countenance, Rung Lapstone looked on the scene of joyous reunion.

At that instant the villain who stood near was forgotten, and he might have escaped had he so desired. Once he thought of doing so, but he called suddenly to mind the fact that the outlaw avenger was in the mountains seeking him, with a deadly purpose in view, and knowing the California colonel to be a square man, Lapstone felt that he would be safe from Kinkfoot Karl at least while under Wixwalter's protection, which for the present was the grand desideratum.

Consequently, after Colonel Wixwalter had listened to his daughter's story and looked up, the ex-mine-owner still stood near, with folded arms, regarding the twain curiously.

Lifting Evadne in his arms, Colonel Wixwalter bore her to the trail, and placed her in the saddle. Then he sprang up behind the maiden and looked back to see another horse carrying double, one of the Cape Horn miners having given Rung Lapstone a seat on his stout nag.

Then the cavalcade moved away.

Six miles to the southeast lay Cape Horn, nestled among the hills, and toward this point the mounted party moved. It was an anxious time for Rung Lapstone.

The last of the sixteen!

Continually this thought haunted the late mine-owner, and that hour's journey to Cape Horn was an hour of riding on nettles.

The trail widened. Two horsemen could ride abreast now, and half a mile further would take the horsemen into Cape Horn. The sun was well down the western sky, and another hour would witness his disappearance for the night.

Rung Lapstone breathed easier.

They were now passing a clump of trees. The trail a little way ahead, turned sharp to the left, as it entered upon the plot of ground on which the mining-town was built.

"Halt! Hands up!"

It was a startling sight that met the gaze of the astounded miners, as they turned the corner.

Drawn up in line to dispute their passage were ten men, roughly clad, bearded, fierce-looking fellows, who were mostly strangers to Colonel Wixwalter. Not all, however, for two faces he recognized. One of these was the face of Kinkfoot Karl!

"Halt, you cannot pass," cried the mountain outlaw, as he flung back his cloak, revealing a girdle of glittering weapons. Rung Lapstone's heart gave a great throb of terror, and he grasped the reins to turn the horse he had bestrode. He did turn the animal, but chance for escape was shut off in the rear also.

Half a score of mounted men were drawn up across the trail, and conspicuous among the faces were those of Samson Hyte and Pete Homespun.

"No yer don't, pard," uttered the giant miner, as he smiled in the face of Rung Lapstone. "You're cornered this time I reckon, so't yer won't git off very easy."

Beyond the speaker sat Burril Graylock, who lifted his hat and bowed to Evadne, as the latter looked about.

The miners with Colonel Wixwalter, drew their weapons, but they found that the outlaws had them covered, and the first move to open hostilities would doom half their number to instant death.

Colonel Wixwalter was the first to recover from his surprise.

"Kinkfoot Karl, this is the boldest move you have made yet. If robbery is your object—"

"It is not, colonel," interrupted the young outlaw quickly. "It is the man calling himself Rung Lapstone we seek. He is with your party, and the last of the doomed sixteen! We have been following him to-day, and now that we have cornered the villain, Kinkfoot Karl is at the end of his trail of vengeance!"

The speaker and his nine comrades, were on foot, having left their horses a little way off, secreted in the copse. Rung Lapstone heard the words of the young mountain outlaw with a sinking heart. He was facing the speaker now, and his hand lay under the folds of his coat, on the butt of a six-shooter, of which Colonel Wixwalter had neglected to deprive him.

There was a desperate look in the hunted felon's eyes, and his teeth were clinched together. He made no move then, however, but watched the face of Kinkfoot Karl as though fascinated.

"Yes, Colonel Wixwalter, I am at the end of the trail," proceeded the mountain outlaw. "Rung Lapstone is the last of the sixteen murderers. You will love him no better than I do when I tell you the facts. Shall I tell you the story, colonel?"

"Proceed."

All eyes were now turned toward Kinkfoot Karl, who pushed his sombrero back, revealing a noble white brow and piercing black eyes.

"For eighteen months I have followed a trail of vengeance," said the youth, "a trail that ends to-day and here. Two lads, boys of nineteen, struck the mining-town of Sure Deal two years ago. They were not city lads, but had been

reared from infancy to youth on the prairies and amid the mountains of Arizona.

"These boys never knew father nor mother, but were nursed and cared for by Nataniscom, an Apache chief and his wife. Indian ways they did not learn as one would suppose, and when ten years of age, they were rescued from the Indians by a band of trappers, and lived with the whites the greater part of the next nine years.

"Both boys were naturally anxious to know who they were, and if their parents were living. An old trapper told them a strange story of massacre and villainy, in which an emigrant train was destroyed by Indians under the lead of a renegade. Two babes were borne from the bloody scene alive, and a white woman. The name of the renegade was Harris Maltby, but the white woman and the babes were not known to the old hunter. Henry and Lewis believed they were those babes, and perhaps the white woman was their mother.

"Immediately on making this discovery, the two boys resolved to search the wide West over for Harris Maltby, as he alone could tell them the facts. Among the mines they searched, but their efforts were unavailing for years. Of course the renegade had changed his name, and this rendered the hunt more difficult.

"Henry and Lewis struck Sure Deal, California, two years ago, and here they resolved to rest for a time; but Henry alone appeared to the miners, or at any rate the men of Sure Deal did not suspect more than one person occupied the cabin of Little Gaudy.

"Yes, Henry bore that name in the mining-camp. Some of you may know how the boy died. Rung Lapstone robbed his partner of hard-earned gold and turned suspicion on Henry, or Little Gaudy. The boy was seized—"

"You are a base liar!"

For the first time a voice had interrupted the story of Kinkfoot Karl. Rung Lapstone, white with rage, flung the words into the face of the narrator.

CHAPTER XL.

A PARTING SHOT—CONCLUSION.

"RUNG LAPSTONE, you must not interrupt me," said the narrator. "Colonel Wixwalter, keep your eye on that villain while I finish my story."

Kinkfoot Karl proceeded:

"Henry was accused of the theft, bound to a tree, and flogged by Rung Lapstone until nearly dead."

The outlaw then gave a minute description of all that happened that night and of the day following, all of which the reader is familiar with.

"Under the mountain shadows of the Golden State, beside Henry's grave, I swore to avenge his death. I was an expert at knife-throwing, having learned it when with the Indians at an early age, and I resolved to use my skill to good purpose in hunting from the face of the earth the sixteen assassins of Little Gaudy. One by one they began to fall, and in sheer terror they fled from the State. In Idaho they found rest for the time, but soon the avenger found them out.

"One word now as regards the noted Mountain Scourge, Kinkfoot Karl. *He is dead!*"

This announcement created a sensation.

"You wonder at the statement, yet it is nevertheless true. About a year ago he was captured and lynched in Arizona, I think; but this was not well known, although it destroyed his band. I at once saw an opportunity to do effective work under the name of the mountain robber. I assumed the name of the dead Scourge, and organized a band of good men and true, with whom I have carried on the work of vengeance. No innocent blood stains my hands, but fifteen murderers have fallen by the bullet and the blade of—*Lewis Wixwalter!*"

The colonel started and trembled visibly, while many an astonished gaze was fixed on the face of the speaker. He stepped backward suddenly, flung off coat and hat, then, with a dexterous, lightning-like move, brought away the huge mustache and long flowing hair, revealing a handsome, pallid face and closely-cropped curling hair.

"My God! it is *Little Gaudy!*"

In husky accents the words echoed from the lips of the astounded Rung Lapstone, and for some moments he trembled like one in an ague-fit.

"I don't wonder you tremble, Harris Maltby," uttered the handsome youth, "for your hands strangled the boy you accused of theft that night at Sure Deal. You are mistaken, however. I am not that poor boy. He could not come back if he would; but, cowardly villain, I am *Little Gaudy's twin brother!*"

Colonel Wixwalter's face had grown deadly pale, and his lips murmured the name of his long-dead wife.

"It is her face, *her face,*" he murmured in a bewildered daze.

Of a sudden, the youth turned toward the California colonel and said:

"I have little more to say, colonel. This morning I learned my own family name for the first time. By merest chance—perhaps the hand of God was in it—I ran upon old Nata-

niscom, who had fallen from a cliff and was dying. I had not met the old Indian since I lived with him long years ago. Once again I pleaded with him to tell me who I was, and he told the facts. The oldest boy of the Wixwalters was slain, but the twin babes, Lewis and Henry, were saved and cared for by Nataniscom and his wife. The mother was saved also, and fell to the hands of Joe Pewomo, brother to Nataniscom's wife. The babes were taken to Arizona, the mother to Idaho, then a region comparatively unknown to white men. Here, held a close prisoner, Marion Wixwalter lived for years, until her escape some months ago—"

"Escape!" cried the colonel. "Are you crazy, boy? She died a year ago—"

"That part of my story was false, John."

With a strange cry, Colonel Wixwalter turned in his saddle, to see Pete Homespun approaching. It was the Yankee's voice that called him John, and—of a sudden, a queer metamorphosis took place.

White hat, yellow "soap locks" and pointed yellow beard lay on the ground, and there, sitting in the saddle, pale as death, as she looked into the eyes of Colonel John Wixwalter, was a woman; not young, but comely even though silver threads were woven in the brown, close-cut hair.

One glance and then:

"Marion, my wife!" from the faltering lips of the Californian. An instant later he had sprung from the saddle and clasped the one long-supposed dead to his heart, and then—crack!

A sharp report rung on the air.

With a mad oath Harris Maltby had drawn his revolver, and fired full at the head of Lewis Wixwalter. Then, as the youth went down, with one sweep of his arm the felon hurled his companion from the saddle, and was seen the next moment dashing madly away. A wild cry followed, and several men bent above the bleeding youth on the grass.

"The avenger's trail ends here. *Hoi hoi!*"

This cry Rung Lapstone, *alias* Harris Maltby, sent back over his shoulder, as he dashed swiftly away. He no longer feared the knife of Kinkfoot Karl, or the haunting face of the dead. If he could only escape now, all would be well; no sleuth-hound was left to follow on his track.

But there was one among that goodly company who was cool and collected, and he, too, felt like acting the avenger, as he saw the man who had personated Kinkfoot Karl go down.

A long arm shot forward as the words came back so full of taunting mockery; then came a flash, a stinging report, and then a riderless horse dashed on, while the man of many crimes, who has figured in this tragic drama as Rung Lapstone, the miner king, went crashing to earth with a bullet in his brain.

"*The trail ends here!*"

The words were uttered grimly by Samson Hyte, as he lowered his arm, slipped from the saddle, and hastened to the side of his fallen friend.

With the end of the trail of vengeance, our story comes to a close. Lewis Wixwalter was not seriously injured by the bullet fired at his life by the dethroned king of Quartzville.

It was a most happy reunion that took place some time later at the house of Colonel Wixwalter.

"Soon after assuming my disguise I met you," said Marion to her husband, "and when I heard of your daughter, I supposed you had married again. Why did I assume the disguise? The better to learn something of my children. I believed they still lived, and that Maltby knew where they were. It seems I was mistaken."

The colonel hugged his wife and kissed her, and they seemed to be enjoying a second honeymoon after their twenty-years' separation.

"No, not until Nataniscom's revelation did I know who Kinkfoot Karl was," said the colonel's wife. "This has been a day of revelations indeed."

Lewis came to them then with a bandaged head.

He had terribly avenged the death of his brother; and not one who heard the story of his trail of vengeance but gave him credit for executing a terrible yet just retribution upon the murderers.

Peace and prosperity came to Quartzville and Cape Horn with the death of Rung Lapstone. But the colonel remained only long enough to settle his business affairs, and then he returned to San Francisco.

Some months later a wedding took place in the great house of Colonel Wixwalter.

The lovely bride was, of course, Evadne, and the happiest man in California, Burril Graylock.

Samson Hyte was there, a welcome guest, and the lovely bride permitted the jolly miner's salute after the marriage with good grace, since, next to her husband and foster-father, she loved the brave and noble giant who had rendered herself and friends such effective service.

As for Lewis Wixwalter, he soon forgot his mad passion for his fair cousin, and in time brought home one of Frisco's daughters to make him happy, and—but we can add nothing more.

THE END.

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